Diverge, Converge

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/39755688.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Category:
Gen

Fandoms:
Pokemon Legends: Arceus (Video Game), Pocket Monsters | Pokemon - All Media Types, Pocket Monsters: Black & White | Pokemon Black and White Versions, Pocket Monsters: Black 2 & White 2 | Pokemon Black 2 & White 2 Versions

Relationships:
Kudari | Emmet & Nobori | Ingo, Kamitsure | Elesa & Kudari | Emmet, Kamitsure | Elesa & Nobori | Ingo, Hikari | Dawn & Nobori | Ingo, Nobori | Ingo & Shou | Akari

Characters:
Nobori | Ingo, Kudari | Emmet, Kamitsure | Elesa, Hikari | Dawn, Shou | Akari, Chandela | Chandelure, Nobori no Glion | Ingo's Gliscor, Glion | Gliscor, Nobori no Mojumbo | Ingo's Tangrowth, Mojumbo | Tangrowth, Dentula | Galvantula, Shibirudon | Eelektross

Additional Tags:
Reunions, Hurt/Comfort, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Scars, Reunion Fic, hinted suicidal thoughts, Crying, Found Family, Memory Loss, Angst with a Happy Ending, Loneliness, Mention of Injuries and Scars, Family, Uncle Ingo, ran out of reunion fics so I wrote my own, Ingo had a Rough Time in Hisui but he has an honorary niece now so that's rad, Emmet and Elesa are just happy to have their brother back, even if he doesn't really remember them, Emmet's POV, Panic Attacks

Language:
English

Collections:

Suggested Good Reads

Stats:

Published: 2022-06-19 Completed: 2022-09-04 Words: 42,572
Chapters: 7/7

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by Level99Eevee

Summary

On a quiet Thursday evening, Emmet is sent a video from an unknown number.

Whatever he expects to see, someone who looks devastatingly similar to his missing brother is not it. Especially not when that someone steps in to stop a rampaging steelix from destroying a campsite in an entirely different region.

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Ingo comes home. He's scarred in both body and mind and doesn't remember much, but he is still Ingo. In the end, that's all that really matters.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

It starts with a video sent on a quiet Thursday evening.

A *damp* Thursday evening, one following a rainy day. The kind of day where Emmet refuses to even glance at his feet on the way to and from work, for fear of catching his own face in the reflections puddling along the roads and sidewalks. Instead, he steps straight through whatever water he comes across. His shoes are soaked through and his socks are horribly soggy by time he makes it home that evening, but he'll take it over the alternative of thinking for even a split-second that he's seeing Ingo from the corner of his eye.

He is verrrrry glad that the subway runs underground, where it is dry.

He is even more glad when he finally makes it back to their—to *his* apartment complex, riding the cold elevator up up up in his uncomfortable wet socks and unlocking the front door with a too-loud jingle of keys in the empty hallway. As soon as he steps inside, he listens hopefully for the drone of the television or the high-pitched chatter of emolga from the living room.

All that meets him is silence, thick and smothering. He lets his smile fall. Looks like Elesa is not eating dinner with them tonight.

Emmet sighs and closes the door, releasing the Pokemon he took with him to Gear Station. They each give him a quick nuzzle or chirp of greeting (or in Eelektross' case, a hug that feels more like a loving attempt to strangle him) before running off to do Important Pokemon Business. Galvantula takes a moment longer, as usual, to fret over him, tugging at his rain-spattered pant leg with a concerned chitter until he stoops to give her soft, staticky fur a few pets. She nips his gloved hand with a loving spark of static, then finally skitters off into the apartment.

Emmet straightens, removing his hat and coat and hanging them on their designated hooks. The empty spot at their side sends a quick jab of pain through his chest, as it has every day for the past three years, four months and six days. Emmet thinks not for the first time about the saying that grief is supposed to dull with time. His certainly hasn't.

Still, he ignores it and toes off his shoes, making sure to line them up neatly. Then he removes his gloves and peels off his socks with a

grimace, rolling up the ends of his pants. Puts himself in working order before heading into the kitchen to start dinner for their Pokemon.

He works on autopilot, gathering fresh vegetables and berries from the fridge and counter, as well as a gravy mix and different packets of pokechow. He hesitates when he reaches for the ghost-type mix, wondering if Chandelure will actually leave her pokeball tonight to eat.

It's a good thing ghost types don't need to eat as often as most Pokemon, because Emmet does not know how to convince Chandelure to do so more than once a week, releasing her from her ball and pleading with tears in his eyes and a crack in his voice for her to please just eat a little.

Ingo would not want to see his beloved partner so distraught, vibrant purple flames dulled to a pale, sickly lavender and every cry a haunting chime of grief. But Emmet does not know how to perform the proper maintenance for her when he is barely holding on himself.

So Emmet swallows hard, ignoring a jab of guilt when he puts the ghost type food back in its spot. He just…does not think he can deal with that tonight.

It had been a long day at the station.

Then again, most days are long anymore. Emmet can't ever remember feeling the hours drag and grate like they do nowadays, not before his brother disappeared. Vanished in the darkness of the tunnels like a ghost, leaving even his beloved Pokemon behind.

Emmet uses his arm to scrub at his eyes, trying to stay focused before he burns himself on the stove, where the gravy to soften the pokefood sits bubbling. Safety first. He reaches for the knife and cutting board, pulling some of the vegetables and berries closer.

He tries not to think about Ingo, when he can. It's impossible to not, when his grief sits in an Ingo-shaped space at his side at all times, reminding him that his brother is *gone gone gone* every hour of every day, but he tries not to consciously dwell on it, when possible.

That's all he did the first year. Desperately tried to think about where his brother was, what had happened to him, if he was safe.

If he was alive.

He chops into a nanab berry a bit too hard, almost cutting into his finger. Whoops. Emmet realigns and takes measured breaths as he continues to work. Somewhere in the apartment, Haxorus bellows out a warning to one of the other Pokemon who is causing trouble. Probably Durant.

No, Emmet puts a lot of his energy each day into trying *not* to think about Ingo. About if he was taken by someone. If someone hurt him. If a ghost Pokemon somehow spirited him away to his doom even under Chandelure's watchful eye.

(The police and the tabloids questioned Emmet for weeks after the disappearance, as if he knew what happened to his brother. As if *Emmet* could be the reason he is gone, when Elesa and their Pokemon are the only reason Emmet is even still alive.

Emmet still has a video saved on his phone of Elesa punching a reporter square in the face. They had asked Emmet point-blank if he killed his brother, making his smile fall in shock. Putting the video on loop and watching Elesa nearly break the reporter's nose cheers him up sometimes.)

The tabloids are dumb. They also suggested that Ingo might have gotten sick of his strange, overbearing brother and left him behind, and while Emmet does not fault that logic alone—

(Emmet has always been too much for most people, too obsessed with Pokemon and battling and trains and whatever else grabbed his interest, too unsettling with his ever-present smile and monotone voice, his ever-moving hands and blunt words.)

—but his brother would have taken his Pokemon with him if he had left willingly. Chandelure at the very least. It's silly to even think otherwise.

So Emmet knows his brother disappeared unwillingly. And if Emmet thinks about *that* too hard he spirals again, so he tries not to. Instead, he finishes mixing the gravy into the batches of Pokemon food alongside the freshly cut berries and veggies, adding some final seasoning and dividing them up into their proper portions in different bowls.

Maybe he should have turned on the television. At least for a background distraction.

Still, Emmet finally gets dinner prepared, putting the dishes in their

rightful spots—Durant can't be too close to Crustle or he steals his food, Haxorus and Garbodor need to eat in different rooms entirely due to their size alone—before calling out to his and Ingo's team.

"All aboard!"

Something clatters to the floor in a different room, followed by Haxorus' warning growl and Durant's skittering feet. Everyone else's footsteps sound throughout the apartment as the Pokemon cry out happily, barreling into the kitchen like excited lillipups and diving right in. Emmet's smile feels less strained as he watches them eat, making contented noises. At least he can keep them healthy and happy.

Well. Most of them.

Emmet sighs and turns to dig through the fridge for something for him to eat. Elesa always brings food—usually takeout or a frozen pre-made meal—with her when she stays over, and on the nights when she doesn't, Emmet is never prepared. He eventually grabs leftover Kalosian from the night before, putting it in the microwave to heat it up. When it's lukewarm, he eats it without really tasting, forcing himself through the process of chewing each bite and swallowing it with more effort than he should.

Emmet rinses his fork and places it carefully in the dishwasher. Then he collects the Pokemon bowls as well, washing them out and putting them into the sink to soak.

Emmet should shower, but even that sounds like too much effort tonight. Instead, he goes to his room, refusing to glance at his brother's closed door across the hall, and changes into a comfortable pair of sweats and a t-shirt, both soft enough not to rub the wrong way against his skin.

The room is dark in the dim evening light. Emmet should turn on a lamp and get some paperwork done. Or read, or…something.

But instead he just flops into bed, staring up at the ceiling.

It never used to feel like a chore, trying to make it through each day. At least working—

(*Overworking*, Elesa's voice chimes in his head)

—at Gear Station distracts him well enough.

Maybe he should just go to bed. Tomorrow would start sooner then.

Emmet's Xtransceiver, discarded on his blankets, lights up with a quiet buzz. A message. He has most notifications silenced, so he picks it up, expecting to see Elesa's name on the screen. Instead, it's a text from an unfamiliar string of numbers, and a video attachment. Emmet unlocks the Xtransceiver and clicks into the video without reading the text accompanying it, almost hearing his brother scolding him for opening a strange video from someone he doesn't know.

He ignores the imaginary scolding. Ignores the twinge of pain in his chest as well.

Emmet presses play, brow furrowing as a chaotic scene starts to play. It's clearly filmed on a phone, the camera shaky and whipping around an early morning sky before settling on what looks to be the midst of a small trainer campground in the mountains. There are people yelling, panicked and running, and Emmet catches a few glimpses of Pokemon in defensive postures, shooting off attacks or helping injured humans away from the site.

A moment later the cause of all the chaos becomes apparent with a ground-shaking roar, far more wild than any Pokemon cry Emmet has ever heard. It chills something in him as he sits up, focusing more fully.

A moment later a blur of silver—absolutely huge, big and fast and powerful as a subway train—barrels through the corner of the frame, demolishing a tent that thankfully appears empty. The camera jolts as the holder of the camera yells out something in a language Emmet doesn't understand, but recognizes. Sinnohan?

A moment later the blur of silver returns—a steelix, he thinks—barreling with a gaping maw for a downed hiker. Emmet is just about to wonder which sick person sent him a video of someone dying to a wild Pokemon attack when a blur of purple slams into the steelix like a comet. The steelix is hammered into the ground, crashing to a stop in the dirt, tail flailing and taking out another tent in the process.

Everything slows just enough for Emmet to confirm that the aggressive Pokemon is indeed a steelix. The largest, most terrifying steelix he has ever seen. He didn't even know they could get that big.

A small mountain of blue vines—a tangrowth?—bustles over to the downed hiker, scooping up the man before retreating off screen again.

Meanwhile, the steelix struggles to right itself, roaring loud enough to shake the screen—or maybe that's just the filmmaker trembling—while the purple blur hops to the ground, crouched low, tail lashing as it watches with sharp golden eyes. A gliscor.

The steelix snaps at the gliscor with boulder-heavy teeth, and it's only when the gliscor hops back that Emmet notices a person at the flying type's side, not running but instead standing tense and ready, far too close to the fight.

Emmet's heart skips a beat. The posture is unfamiliar, but for a moment he almost thinks—

No. No. He's been through this before. A long, dark coat and hat does not equal Ingo. Emmet snuffs out his hope as soon as it arrives, a sour feeling settling in his stomach, making the noodles he ate earlier want to come back up. He considers closing the video, no longer able to focus on anything but that brief moment of thinking *Ingo Ingo Ingo*—

But he has nothing better to do, right? Might as well see how this plays out.

The steelix rises again, rumbling unhappily before lunging. The man barks an order to the gliscor, who leaps out of the way to climb onto the steelix's back, digging in its claws.

But Emmet can't seem to tear his eyes away from the man in black as he rolls, lightning-quick, out of the way of the steelix's flailing tail, chopping his hand through the air—

Ingo Ingo Ingo

—as he shouts another command. The scene is slightly quieter now, and Emmet finds himself straining to hear the man's voice through the tinny speakers.

He knows it is not Ingo. Can't be Ingo. And yet Emmet can't help continuing to watch with something like desperation.

The tangrowth from before returns on screen, slamming its hands into the ground so vines and roots shoot out at the steelix, snaring its struggling form.

A moment later, a new person runs onscreen from behind the cameraman. It's a girl, a teenager, her red scarf fluttering as she sprints right at the rampaging steelix. Emmet holds his breath as she

rolls under its flailing tail. A heartbeat later a strange, tall bird Pokemon, autumn colored, follows her. It leaps up to slam a leg down on the steelix's head, sending its heavy skull crashing back to the dirt.

The ground shakes. The man behind the camera says something that is clearly a curse, camera fumbling for a moment before refocusing on the fight.

The girl yells something to the man in black (*not* Ingo) and chucks a pouch to him. He catches it without looking, then runs around to the steelix's head, and Emmet's hand tightens around his Xtransceiver. What is he doing? Why are these two getting so involved in this fight? One of the first things trainers are taught is to stay back from battles—especially ones as dangerous as this.

The steelix roars and swings its head around to track the man, flailing to try and throw off the gliscor and bird Pokemon pummeling attacks along its spine. The girl is creeping around to the back of the steelix, tracking its every movement and casually ducking under a tail heavy enough to snap her in half.

The man in black keeps the steelix's attention on him, throwing something small and green near its face that seems to stun the creature, however little. He throws another and another, and the steelix winces at each, growing more and more tense until finally the steelix roars. The force of it is enough to send the man skidding back a few feet, arms up in front of his face. Chunks of the ground around the man suddenly flash and shift. Emmet recognizes the move the instant he sees it, clenching his jaw.

Stealth rock.

Stones shoot up around the man, one of them slicing through his coat and sending him stumbling back a foot, clutching his side. Emmet bites his lip, free hand anxiously drumming on his thigh. This man has to be okay. He has to.

(He is not Ingo, but there is enough of a resemblance that Emmet will have a verrry bad rest of the week if this man is killed onscreen.)

The girl shouts something, voice an octave higher with panic, and launches something at the steelix's back. It connects, and the giant creature glows with the telltale light of a pokeball capture. The massive bulk of the steelix vanishes into the tiny ball, dropping to the dirt.

The girl doesn't even wait to see if the steelix stays in, sprinting over to the man now crouched on the ground. Luckily, the ball rocks once, twice, before stilling with a little shimmer of sparks.

A tense silence falls over the ravaged campsite, save for the girl chattering worriedly at the man, a hand on his back. Emmet sees a few heads of humans and Pokemon peering over the rubble and ruined tents, still cautious. The gliscor, tangrowth and bird—some kind of decidueye? A shiny, maybe?—move to their trainers' sides.

The man behind the camera breathes a sigh of relief, then runs in the direction of the man and girl, a blurring view of dirt and sky filling the screen.

Voices slowly start piping up as soon as it registers that the danger has passed. Some are crying and others are calling to one another, probably asking if everyone is all right. The trills and growls of frightened Pokemon, both wild and caught, sound off alongside the humans. Emmet waits with baited breath.

Finally, the camera slows to a stop and refocuses again, finding the man and girl. There are a few other trainers crowded around them. Emmet pays them no mind, a chilling numbness rolling over his skin, giving him goosebumps as he sees the man in black closer up.

Ingo. That is Ingo.

The man is waving off the other people and standing with the girl supporting him under his shoulder. She's asking him questions with a concerned glance at his side, where his hand is pressed to his ribs. Red is blooming against the pale pink sweatshirt under his coat. Ingo's coat. It's tattered and worn and lighter than it used to be, sun-bleached, and the ratty hat atop the man's head is no better.

But Emmet can hardly focus on that, instead staring at the man's face. Silver hair and a flash of pale eyes, mouth twisted into a pained grimace.

Distantly, Emmet registers that he isn't breathing. That he's gripping his Xtransceiver hard enough for it to creak and bite into his hand. That tears are blurring his vision and trailing hot down his cheeks.

It can't be Ingo. Ingo is gone. Has been gone for three years and four months and six days, vanished without a trace. He's just seeing things he wants to see, again, working himself into another panic attack.

A sudden spark against his knuckles has Emmet jumping, looking down to find his galvantula watching him with static dancing over her fur. She chitters worriedly at him.

Emmet tries to take a breath to say something, to reassure her, and instead sobs. He drops the phone and scoops his beloved Pokemon into his lap, burying one hand into her silky fur and pressing the other into his eyes as he cries and gasps, hot and shaky and on the edge of puking.

Ingo. That was Ingo.

But it can't be Ingo. Why would Ingo be in a random Pokemon attack in some mountain range—in *Sinnoh*, apparently? With a gliscor? It is someone else.

But why would someone send him the video, if not for his link to Ingo? That is the only reason so many people have his number nowadays, connections through Elesa and Iris that have promised to keep an eye out for Ingo and let Emmet know if they see anything. That's what this is—a well-meaning "Ingo spotting."

And still, despite knowing it will only hurt him more, Emmet fumbles to grab the Xtransceiver again. He's shaking so hard that it takes a solid minute of petting his galvantula to calm himself enough to reopen the video. This time, he reads the text that accompanies it:

Yo this is Volkner

I should probably vet this through Elesa first but my friend sent me this video from this morning and I think you should watch it

Then another message, ten minutes later.

Im sorry if im wrong

Ill send it to Elesa too

Emmet clicks open the video again. It looks like it ended shortly after Emmet checked out, so he rewinds it back to when the cameraman approaches the man in black.

And yet, when the man reappears on-screen, he *still* looks like Ingo. Emmet pauses the video. Stares wordlessly at the screen. Tries to debunk it, tries to find something that can definitively disprove this man as his brother.

Can't.

He lets it play until the man is looking away, seen from a different angle, and pauses again. The hair is longer, scruffier, the beard completely new. The cheekbones more prominent, the face thinner. But those are all things that can change on a person.

Emmet scrolls farther, almost desperate to find something that will dismiss this man, something to kill the hope rising in his chest, shoot it down before it grows large enough to take root.

He pauses the video once more when the man is glancing directly at the camera.

The breath is punched out of Emmet's lungs, and his shaking returns full-force. It's not exactly the face that Emmet has been looking at for the past three years, through framed photos and wanted posters. It's older, exhausted and gaunt.

He looks almost exactly like Emmet as he is now.

Emmet keens, dropping his phone to curl around his galvantula and wail into her fur. This isn't *fair*, the world can't keep dangling his brother in front of his face, acting like he will ever reunite with him and then ripping him away all over again, gashing open the scars anew.

Eventually Emmet will bleed himself dry.

Galvantula coos, and Emmet's door creaks open as Archeops pokes his head into the dark room with a worried chirp, letting the harsh light from the hallway spill inside. The little fossil Pokemon scrambles over and crawls onto the bed, hooking his wings around Emmet's shoulders like a comforting hug.

Emmet sniffs tears and snot back—he is going to have a terrrrrible headache—and moves to grab his phone again. He doesn't know how many times he watches the end of the video, desperately drinking in the sight of a man who looks so much like his brother, before a distant pounding on the front door of their—*his* apartment makes him jump.

Emmet blinks, slow, and stares at the wall in the direction of the front door, as if he could see through it like a luxray. He wonders if whoever that is will go away if he doesn't open the door.

He is answered a moment later when he hears the distant rattle of

keys in the lock and the front door slamming open with a frantic, "Emmet!"

Elesa. Good, Elesa will be able to snap him out of his delusions. She always does.

He hears her running through the apartment, then his bedroom door is slammed open as well, flooding the room with light and hurting his tired eyes. He winces.

"Em," Elesa pants, hair a disheveled mess. She's in her zebstrika PJs and a pair of ratty old sneakers that squeak against the hard floor. Her face is covered in sweat and tears, without a stroke of makeup on.

Did she *run* here? Elesa would never leave the house in her casual wear unless—

Unless.

Emmet tries to squash the hope that balloons in his chest. He stares at her, his own face puffy and wet, hoping the question comes through without him having to say it.

"You—saw the—video?" Elesa gasps, stumbling to Emmet's side and flopping down on the bed to grip his arm tight. Painfully tight. She looks like how he feels, barely contained hope only held at bay by bone-deep fear.

"He…he looked like Ingo," Emmet says, faintly.

Elesa, to his shock, wells up with fresh tears and nods, wiping at her eyes. "Y-Yeah. He did. Do you think..?"

Emmet frowns at Elesa, shaking his head. "I *always* think it's Ingo. *You* are supposed to tell me it is not!"

Elesa winces. Her grip tightens, hard enough to leave bruises. "I…I can't say that, Em. This time, I-I don't know. It could be a ditto or something, but—"

Emmet sobs, hating that his one foolproof safety net is suddenly not so safe. He buries his face in Elesa's shoulder to cry and snot all over her designer pajamas. "T-That is it. It's just a ditto."

Before Elesa can answer, Galvantula lets out a small, offended hiss. Emmet glances down to see her clicking her mandibles, annoyed, at

Emmet's phone.

It's lit up. Vibrating with a call.

Emmet, dazed, stares at the unknown caller on his phone screen. A different set of numbers than Volkner's. Elesa turns to stare at it too. For one ring, two. Normally, he would just ignore it. But after that video…

In a haze, Emmet picks up the phone and answers, putting it on speakerphone.

"I am Emmet." His voice sounds like it just went through the garbage disposal.

"Ah, yes, hello!" a bright voice answers, speaking Unovan with a slight Sinnoh accent. "This is Kayo, with Eterna Hospital. In Sinnoh."

Elesa claps a hand over her mouth. Emmet feels like he is in a strange dream. He blinks.

"We had a patient come in earlier today after a Pokemon attack on Mount Coronet. Well, two patients, but—well, we don't have official identification for either of them, but we have an employee who moved here from Nimbasa a year ago and we think—we think one of them is your brother."

Elesa curls into herself, a sob escaping as her shoulders shake. Emmet puts a hand on her back instinctively, long since used to taking turns falling apart. He opens his mouth, but can't seem to make a sound. This is all a dream anyways, so hopefully he is not being too impolite.

"Normally we wouldn't call someone without confirmed identification, but Mary looked like she saw a ghost the moment she saw him and she swears on her mother's life that that's him. He's suffering from memory loss, but he says his name is Ingo and—"

"Memory loss?" Emmet croaks, latching onto that detail.

Because out of everything happening right now, somehow *that* is the only thing that makes sense. If Ingo is alive, the only explanation as to why Emmet hasn't heard from him in over three years is that he is either being held captive somewhere, or doesn't even *know* to contact him.

As horrifying as that thought is.

“Yes,” Kayo answers, nerves audible in her voice. “He remembers… very little about himself. But the girl he came in with confirms that his name is Ingo and that both of them have been, ah…missing for quite some time, although she wouldn’t say where they were.”

Elesa rips the phone from Emmet’s hand, clutching onto it like a lifeline. “I-Is he all right? Is he hurt?”

The woman on the phone hesitates, and Emmet’s chest tightens.

“He has a fresh injury from the attack, but nothing too serious. Everything else is long since healed.”

Everything else? That is a…concerning statement.

“Can we see him?” Elesa chokes, voice raw and desperate. “Please. You said Eterna Hospital, right? In Sinnoh?”

“Yes! Yes. His injury should be a fairly simple procedure, so he’ll likely be ready for discharge in a day or two. Due to his memory loss we can keep him here a bit longer for observation, for his own safety. If you can get to the hospital, we can release him to you.”

It’s at this point that Emmet feels himself drift. He’s glad that Elesa is here, because he can’t handle this phone call right now.

Ingo is…alive?

Ingo is *maybe* alive. Emmet won’t truly believe it until he sees it with his own eyes, until he can talk to his brother in-person. He doesn’t want to risk it again, hoping so desperately that this lead will finally bring his brother home, but at the same time he knows he can’t *not* follow it.

Not if it could lead him to Ingo.

Elesa finishes the phone call, and for a moment they just stare at each other, crying silently. Dull with shock.

“Em,” She finally rasps. “This…it might really be him.”

Emmet swallows hard and shakes his head. “We do not know that. We cannot—”

“We’ll find out,” Elesa interrupts, leaning forward to pull Emmet into a bone-crushing hug. He gratefully squeezes her in return, Galvantula making a noise of protest at being smushed between them before

escaping.

Emmet doesn't know how long they stay like that, tangled up in a hug too tight to breathe through, shuddering and crying. It's fully night by time Emmet pulls away, exhausted and hollow. His eyes feel sore.

His heart aches.

Every time he is forced to think about Ingo, he is forced to relive the emotions of his loss. He misses his brother very, verrrrry much.

Emmet doesn't even realize that Elesa has pulled out her own phone to tap away at the screen until she locks it again, giving a decisive nod. "Plane tickets are booked."

Emmet blinks at her. "Plane tickets?"

"One-way trip to Sinnoh, bright and early," Elesa confirms. She's wiping at her eyes, smoothing down her hair and entering Business Mode. Emmet knows it makes her feel better in upsetting situations, to take control and *do* something. He's grateful for that right now, considering he feels too tired to even move. "We'll get you packed, set an alarm so we can get some sleep, then in the morning we'll swing around my place on the way to the airport."

To the airport. To fly to Sinnoh. To see—

To see a man who looks like his brother.

It feels better to think of him that way. So if they are wrong (*when* they are wrong), it will hurt less. To not think of him as Ingo.

Still, Emmet nods, feeling a bit disconnected from his body, and goes on autopilot to text the second-in-command at Gear Station and tell them he will be taking tomorrow and the rest of the weekend off.

He has more than enough vacation days saved up, after all.

It's short notice, but his second replies enthusiastically and tells him to have a nice weekend. Emmet knows she worries about him getting enough rest.

When Emmet looks up again, Elesa is already halfway through packing his suitcase, plucking shirts and pants and boxers from his drawers and closet. He would be embarrassed by her casually folding and arranging his clothes like his mother if the two of them hadn't

crossed the line of dignity long ago, back on their own Pokemon journeys. She has seen him and Ingo at their absolute worst. Emmet especially, over the past three years.

He is also just grateful that he doesn't have to get up and do it himself. He's exhausted all of a sudden, his mind is drifting, and his limbs feel too heavy to lift. Plus, he trusts her to pick out enough outfits that he likes for the trip.

Then suddenly, he is packed, his galvantula, archeops and eelektross' poke balls sitting atop his suitcase and waiting to be clipped to his belt in the morning. And then Elesa is putting his toothbrush in his hand and urging him to brush, using the spare she keeps at their apartment for herself. And then they are both in Emmet's bed, Galvantula curled up in the crook of Emmet's knee as Elesa snuggles up next to him, taking his hand.

The contact is like a shock to his system. Warm. Slowly, Emmet feels himself touch ground again. Just a bit. He blinks at his friend. "Thank you."

"Of course, Em," Elesa says, yawning. She looks at him through exhausted, half-lidded eyes. "You okay?"

Emmet nods, and knows that neither of them believe it. Still, Elesa wraps an arm around his side and urges him to sleep.

It takes him over an hour to get there, physically and emotionally drained and yet still unable to drop off. He keeps dancing between thoughts of Ingo, of seeing his brother again, and desperately trying to block those thoughts before they can even appear.

Finally, he sleeps.

Elesa was not exaggerating, and her alarm goes off at the crack of dawn. Groaning, she rolls out of bed to silence it, then rips the blanket off Emmet. He whines as Galvantula hisses, until Elesa says, "C'mon, Em. Sinnoh awaits."

And then Emmet remembers.

His chest feels like it caves in, a dark pit opening up where his heart should be. It hurts and makes him feel a little nauseous.

Right. They are going to see the man who looks like his brother.

But who is almost definitely not his brother.

Still, Emmet nods and drags himself out of bed and to the bathroom to get ready. The sooner they get going, the sooner they can get this over with and try to pull the shattered pieces of themselves back together again.

(How many times can they do it before they're broken beyond repair?)

By time the two of them leave the apartment, Emmet is reluctantly nibbling at a bagel that Elesa had shoved at him. He isn't in the mood to eat and hates the feeling of it sitting heavy in his gut, but he tries to finish at least half of it. His rolling suitcase is pulled behind him as they make their way down the busy city street to Elesa's. He isn't feeling anything like optimistic, but he's…

Well, he's trying not to think about it. Or about how Elesa had grabbed Chandelure's always-occupied pokeball off his dresser.

(She never brought Chandelure on a lead before. Why is Emmet the more skeptical one this time around?)

Elesa changes and packs up at her place in record time, and somehow manages to call a driver to take them to the airport in the process. She even looks like her usual flawless self, full makeup and all.

Within an hour, they're on a plane and taking off.

Emmet shifts uncomfortably in his seat, grateful that Elesa took the window. While he isn't deathly afraid of heights or flying or anything, he also isn't…fond of it. He would rather imagine they're in a nice, cozy land vehicle instead. Like a train or a subway or even a bus.

To distract himself, he pulls out his phone and immediately opens the video from last night. He peeks at Elesa out of the corner of his eye, trying to gauge if he's about to be scolded, but Elesa just sighs and scoots down in her seat to rest her head on Emmet's shoulder, looking at his screen as well.

"This is a bad idea," she mumbles. But she doesn't stop him.

Emmet takes that as permission, passing her one of his earbuds and settling in, trying to brace his heart to watch the video again, from the beginning.

They're only twenty seconds in when Elesa murmurs, "That is the most terrifying Pokemon I've ever seen."

"It is verrrrry aggressive," Emmet agrees. "And verrrrry big."

The purple blur of gliscor shoots on-screen, slamming the steelix into the ground. It's only once the man in black appears that Emmet squints. Where did he even come from? He pauses. Rewinds a few seconds. Plays it again, frame by frame.

Sure enough, Emmet realizes that there is a barely-visible smudge of black riding atop the gliscor as it dunks the steelix into the earth.

Elesa takes a sharp breath. "If that *is* Ingo, I'm going to kill him myself."

"He clearly needs a reintroduction to the basics of battling safety," Emmet agrees, a worried furrow forming in his brow as he watches the man in black stand in the middle of the fray, tense and ready but far too close to a Pokemon willing and more than able to kill him.

He watches the man roll out of the way of the steelix with practiced ease, and something in his gut twists.

"Ingo does not know how to dodge like that," Emmet says, not sure if he's hoping for a counter-argument or not.

"He didn't three years ago," Elesa says, voice soft. "But a lot can change in three years, Em."

He supposes that is true. His entire life changed in an instant, the night Ingo never arrived home. Emmet does not bring up his next two points against this man possibly being Ingo, since he imagines Elesa's previous comment applies to both.

Ingo does not have a gliscor. But he would not go long without any Pokemon, and he did not have his team. It makes sense he would catch more.

Ingo also did not have a teenager at his side, looking far too concerned about his well-being to be a stranger, and that really is one of the biggest points against this "Ingo." But that too could have

changed.

Whoever this man is, both Emmet and Elesa wince when they see him antagonizing the steelix to keep it distracted from the girl, moments later rewarded with a stealth rock to the side. In this moment more than any of the others, Emmet hopes this man is not Ingo. The nurse at the hospital didn't seem too concerned about his injury, but…if this is Ingo, he knows he will watch this again in the future and have nightmares about that moment. Imagine the rock shooting a few inches farther back, lodging itself into the man's heart instead of just grazing his torso.

Emmet shakes his free hand out, flinging the horrible thoughts off like water, before paying attention to the screen again as the man in black is shown closer up. This time, Elesa pauses it.

The both of them stare at the face that looks so, so much like Ingo.

"It has to be him," Elesa whispers, voice cracking. "*Look* at him, Em."

Emmet swallows, blinking back tears. "I will not believe it until I see him in-person."

Elesa sighs, but nods her head, settling against him again.

They watch the video at least five more times before Elesa suggests they put it away.

Emmet gets an hour or two of fitful sleep on the plane, and as soon as they land they call a car to take them to the hotel to drop off their luggage and Pokemon. Not even stopping to eat, they call one more car to take them to the hospital where the man in black is staying at.

Each step along the journey, Emmet feels his anxiety grow. His hands are sweating buckets under his gloves and *that* sensation is worse than any texture that could rub him the wrong way, so he takes them off, tucking them into his pocket so he can drum his fingers against his knees.

He doesn't know why he is so nervous. He knows it won't be Ingo. It is never Ingo. Maybe his body is just bracing for the fresh wave of

heartbreak.

Eventually, Elesa reaches over and takes Emmet's closest hand, giving him a squeeze. Emmet thinks it is as much for her comfort as his own, seeing the nerves in how she steadfastly looks out the window and tugs idly at her hair extensions.

When they arrive at the hospital, Elesa marches them up to the front desk, explaining who they are and what they're doing there. The nurse on duty timidly says something in another language—Sinnohan—and gestures for them to wait before bustling off. She returns a moment later with a different woman in tow, who greets them with a beaming smile and perfect Unovan.

"Hey! I'm Mary. Kayo said she mentioned me last night. I'm *so* glad you're here. I know this whole thing kind of breaks the usual protocol, but I rode the subway for *years* in 'Basa and I would recognize Subway Master Ingo pretty much anywhere. Especially after, well." She gives Emmet a sympathetic look.

Distantly, Emmet thinks this woman does seem a bit familiar. If Ingo were here he would likely strike up an excited conversation about crossing tracks with an old passenger. But Emmet is here instead, so he simply keeps his strained smile and sends Elesa a glance, quietly begging her to take over.

He just wants to get this over with. Prove that this man is not his brother so they can go back to the hotel to lick their wounds in peace.

Elesa easily steps in, giving the woman a tired smile. "Thank you so much for calling us. The other nurse said he's not hurt too badly?"

"Yes! Yes, he's fine—or, well, he will be. His injury from yesterday is all stitched up and he's already had a few rounds of heal pulse treatment." For the first time, Mary's upbeat demeanor falters. "But, uh…he is acting a bit different. Just as a warning. I know I only saw him when he was at work, but I think his lack of memories is making him a bit…tense."

"More like unruly," a nurse stopping by the front desk mutters, before stepping away again just as quickly. Mary gives her back a glare.

Emmet blinks. Unruly? He doesn't think Ingo has ever been described as *unruly* in their life. That is more of Emmet's thing. "What."

"He was sedated while we stitched him up," Mary says. "He only woke

up a short while ago, and he tried to leave the hospital after that. He seemed…sort of panicked. We have an espurr in the room with him right now, making sure he stays put. We tried explaining that he can't leave yet and that we called you to the hospital, but he doesn't seem to trust us."

Emmet blinks, still thrown. Why would this man not trust a hospital?

Ingo would.

"We'll deal with that when we get to it," Elesa says, clearly concerned but anxious to just *see* the man. "Did you check to see if he's, you know. Actually human?"

"Oh! Absolutely, especially once we realized who we might have on our hands. We had three different Pokemon check him, to make sure that he isn't a ditto or some kind of illusion," the nurse assures, giving them another beaming smile. "He's definitely human."

Something in Elesa seems to unwind at that, her whole posture drooping with relief as she plants her hands on the desk and blinks hard. "Good. Good. Thank you."

That is not enough for Emmet.

"I am Emmet. I want to see him myself."

Mary nods, but looks troubled. She bites her lip and glances at Elesa. "I'm sorry to say this, but we're restricting visitation to one person at a time, at least at first. Doctor's orders, unless Ingo requests otherwise. He's clearly stressed and we don't want to overwhelm him."

Emmet blinks, trying to process what that means.

Elesa hisses a frustrated breath through her teeth. "Fine. But Emmet's going first."

Oh. Elesa cannot come with him? He frowns and turns to Mary. "But Elesa is our sister."

Maybe not in blood, or legally, but in everything that matters.

Mary winces. "I'm sorry. Trust me, I would let you both go up if I could. If your meeting with Ingo goes well and he approves another visitor, you can come back and grab miss Elesa as well."

Emmet isn't the best with expressions, but even he can see that Mary

is genuinely upset about having to split them up. Despite that, for a moment Emmet wants to argue, furious that after everything Elesa did to get them here, worrying just as much as Emmet that this is Ingo, that this *isn't* Ingo, some stupid rules are keeping her from meeting with the man in black.

Elesa missed Ingo almost as much as Emmet did.

Before he can get fired up, Elesa's hand lands on his arm. When he looks at her, she's holding back tears. "Em, it's all right. Just—can you go see if it's him? Please? I need to know."

All of Emmet's fury leaves him in a rush, leaving only cold trepidation behind. He swallows hard, staring at her and trying to impart how afraid he is to do this alone.

Elesa squeezes his arm, giving him a slightly-forced grin. "You can do it, Em. C'mon. Go get your brother."

Emmet's smile wobbles. "You do not know it is him."

"And we won't know unless you check. Just make sure you come get me if it's him."

Emmet takes a deep breath and nods, reaching up to squeeze Elesa's hand. "Right. Yes. I will do that."

Mary gestures Elesa over to the waiting room chairs and then turns to lead Emmet through a doorway into the hospital halls proper. Emmet follows, stiff and feeling his heart pound faster and faster with each step, glancing nervously at the doors and beeping machines that they pass. The whole place is chilly, smelling of antiseptic.

When they are in the elevator, Emmet anxiously curls and uncurls his hands, practically vibrating. Mary glances at him with what is probably supposed to be a soothing smile, but otherwise doesn't say anything else, which Emmet is glad for.

Then, too soon and not soon enough, they are in front of a half-open door. Room 826. Mary leaves him with another smile and instructions to grab a nurse if he needs anything.

And then Emmet is alone. He stares at the room, trying to listen for anything other than his pulse roaring in his ears.

How many times has he had a nightmare just like this?

How many times has he had a *dream* just like this, a happy reunion filling him with joy only to be ripped away as he woke?

Emmet cannot handle this being another dream, so he pinches his thigh, hard enough to leave a bruise. He winces, then glances around as the hospital remains.

Real, then.

A man awaits him, just a doorway away. A man who looks like his brother. And yet Emmet is rooted to the spot, filled with equal parts dread and hope. He'd tried so hard not to get his hopes up on the way here. So, *so* hard.

And yet here he is, hoping anyways.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Emmet reunites with his brother.

Chapter Notes

Hey! Quick warning for a few moments in here if you're not in the best head space. Nothing graphic, but there is a short panic attack from Emmet's perspective, a brief moment of throwing up, and one or two quick hints of suicidal thoughts. I promise this is overall a very happy chapter, though! ^^' Enjoy and let me know if I need to put anything else up here in this little content warning!

Emmet feels incredibly silly, trembling in the hospital hallway with a shaky smile on his face. But he can't seem to move forward, instead staring at the half-open doorway that could finally lead him to his brother. What if it's just another false lead, someone who looks like Ingo but really isn't? He's not sure he can handle that.

Emmet wishes Elesa could have come up with him. He feels terribly alone. He wrings his hands and pulls at his fingers almost painfully. A nurse passes by, giving him a concerned look.

Elesa seemed to think it was Ingo. And not only did the nurse *say* the man's name was Ingo, but Emmet *saw* the video. He looked so much like his brother. But his brother did not know how to fight like that. And why would he suddenly surface in Sinnoh of all places, fighting a wild steelix? It doesn't make sense.

Then again, nothing about Ingo's disappearance made sense. Why wouldn't his return be the same?

Emmet shakes his head, trying to calm his pounding pulse. He feels like he can almost hear Elesa in his head, prodding him forward and saying that there is no way to know for sure unless he looks for himself. Slowly, feeling like his feet are weighed down with stone, Emmet steps forward. Once. Twice. Peers in through the half-open door.

Inside, sitting up in a hospital bed, is the man from the video. Emmet's breath catches.

The man is glaring across the room at a tiny gray cat Pokemon with haunting purple eyes. The little Pokemon—an espurr?—stares back, unblinking. The man half-heartedly swings a leg over the side of the bed as if to get up, still watching. The espurr's eyes flash before the man is enveloped in purple psychic energy and gingerly tucked back in. The man sighs and mutters something too low to hear.

His voice is quiet. Too quiet. Ingo was never that quiet.

Emmet's heart sinks.

This can't be his brother. They got it wrong again. Somehow the video just made it *look* like his brother and he got his hopes up for nothing.

(Eventually, this false hope will kill him.)

Besides, the man in the bed doesn't match the picture of Ingo in Emmet's mind. He is not wearing his coat and hat, for one, clothed instead in a pale blue hospital gown. In place of Ingo's ever-present Xtransceiver, an intricate wooden bangle and a bright bracelet made of woven string wrap around his wrist.

And he is…leaner. Not quite skinny, but wiry with muscle and not an ounce of fat. His cheeks look a bit gaunt, tired bags darkening the skin under his eyes. His hair is relatively short much like Emmet's, but it is unkempt and messy. A small beard sits at his chin.

He is also scarred. Even from across the room Emmet sees a faint scar on his temple, with more lacing across his arms, a stark pattern against his lightly tanned skin.

This man cannot be his brother, because he looks older and he seems about twenty pounds too light and Emmet cannot reconcile the idea that Ingo was apart from him and was *hurt* in some way—

But in just as many ways, the man is a mirror image of Ingo.

Pale hair and eyes, a matching set to Emmet's. The slope of his nose and the curve of his ear are identical to the man Emmet has become resigned to seeing in horrifying stillness, in family photos and wanted posters and nightmares. While his physique is different, even sitting down Emmet can tell he would be about the right height, if he were not slightly hunched over. The frown on his face is so familiar it sends pain lancing through Emmet's chest.

It can't be him. And yet...he looks so much like Ingo, down to the way

he moves.

Then the man sighs and runs a hand through his hair, saying something out loud to the espurr in a language that Emmet *thinks* is Sinnohan, and Emmet's tears finally spill over. Ingo was not multilingual before he vanished (and that is certainly *not* Unovan), but the timbre of the man's voice is something that Emmet has been aching to hear for *years*.

That is Ingo.

Emmet holds his breath as tears trickle down his face, staring at the man across the room. At his *brother*. He wants to touch him. He wants to tackle his brother into a hug and never let go. He wants to demand to know *who hurt him*, where he was, if he's okay. He wants him to come home.

But he is held still by his own fear. Because what if he touches Ingo and the man vanishes, like he often does in Emmet's dreams? What if the hospital was wrong and it *is* just a ditto? What if what if *what if?*

He is only derailed from his frantic train of thought by the man—by *Ingo*—snarling a frustrated sound, giving the espurr a look through narrowed eyes. Emmet thinks he catches the word "Akari." Is that a name?

Doesn't matter. Emmet isn't sure when he last saw Ingo so upset.

(At least three years and four months and—)

His brother looks *wild*, so different and clearly having been through… something. Emmet is fairly convinced this is Ingo, but is he *Emmet's* Ingo? He does not recognize his brother's current mood, on edge and ready to lash out. Emmet realizes with a sick feeling in his gut that isn't sure how to approach this version of Ingo.

Ingo has always been the more approachable twin. Not for lack of trying on Emmet's part, but there was just too much he had trouble applying to his own behavior. Ingo was always the first one to approach a crying child or lost Pokemon at Gear Station. While his voice was loud, the concern in it was equally so, and his questions were more tactful and less blunt than Emmet's would have been. His perpetual frown looked more sympathetic than Emmet's strained smile. Ingo had always understood social cues a bit better than Emmet had, and he would crouch down as to not scare the little lost passenger before waving an anxious Emmet over to help.

Emmet had tried to emulate that behavior over the last few years. It didn't work. *Ingo* was the one who knew how to approach frightened passengers. Ingo was the one who knew how to make himself soft and palatable and comforting. All Emmet knows is how to be Emmet. For Ingo, that used to be enough. Now, looking at his brother sitting in the hospital bed like a caged purrloin, bristling with an unfamiliar tension, Emmet doesn't know if it will be.

Then Ingo glances at the strange combination of bracelets around his wrist, and something in his expression falters before becoming determined once more.

Oh.

Emmet breathes again.

Emmet knows his brother's expressions, even now, even the slightest change. Ingo is not angry. Or at least not *only* angry. He is…worried. Scared. Verrry scared. And Emmet cannot stand to see his brother scared. Emmet finally lurches forward, something in his chest *screaming* to do something to help.

Emmet doesn't want to make Ingo's situation worse (the thought that he could scare his own brother makes something in him want to throw up), but his own fretting seems a lot less important in the wake of Ingo's fear. His brother has been who knows where for the past three years, somewhere that ended up with him scarred and lean and with a foreign spark of distrust in his eyes.

So Emmet has to *try*.

He takes a step forward, clicking against the cold tile floor.

Ingo tenses, head shooting up like a prey Pokemon who just heard a hunter in the brush. He looks defensive, ready to leap out of bed and fight, and then—

He stops. For one heartbeat, two, Ingo just stares at him, uncomprehending.

Then, he *moves*.

Ingo tenses, leaning to the left as if to roll from the bed (*No no no—he's injured!*), but stops as his eyes flick first to where the stealth rock got him, and then to the espurr across the room. Panic flashes in his gaze as his free hand flits towards his waist (for a pokeball?) before

clenching into a fist on the bed instead. His head whips up, teeth bared, chest puffing with the start of a yell, looking at Emmet like he is something to fend off, something dangerous, and—

And then Ingo stops, blinking, as he looks again at Emmet's face. His gray eyes flick from Emmet's own—definitely crying again, he is going to be so dehydrated—and down to his mouth. Oh, he forgot to keep smiling.

But somehow, that seems to put Ingo at ease. He continues to stare at Emmet, clearly still wary, but no longer about to bolt from the bed. He mumbles something to himself in that strange language, quietly (quieter than he ever was, what made him so quiet?). Emmet thinks he catches the word "zoroark."

Zoroark? Does his brother think he's a zoroark? There aren't even any zoroark in Sinnoh, as far as Emmet is aware.

(Where has his brother been for three years?)

Ingo is still staring at him, but his brow is furrowed, like he's trying to figure something out.

Emmet takes a deep breath, trying to calm his rolling emotions before speaking. Even still, when he speaks his voice is rough. "I am not a zoroark. I am—"

"Emmet," Ingo whispers. His expression shifts to surprise a moment after he speaks, as if he doesn't know where the word came from.

Emmet stills.

His name sounds wrong—like Ingo is unfamiliar with the word, putting too much emphasis on the second half of it. The uncertainty cuts through Emmet, because his own twin, his best friend who has said his name like a prayer since they were only two years old, doesn't even seem to recognize the familiar set of syllables. And at the same time, there is blinding joy, because his brother has amnesia, has apparently lost even the concept of a hospital supposed to be keeping him *safe*, just a moment ago looked ready to fight Emmet with his bare hands and yet—

He knows Emmet. On some level, he recognizes him. And honestly, just hearing Ingo say his name again is more than Emmet ever dreamed of.

So Emmet, already crying and trying to tug his wobbly lips into a smile, sobs. His hands reach out of their own accord, before he can tell them no, that Ingo might not want to be touched—

(And especially not by someone he apparently hardly recognizes, even if Emmet and Ingo were always each other's exceptions.)

—but his brother reaches out in turn and Ingo's hands—*Ingo's! Hands!* —pull him closer. Emmet grips back much tighter, hooking his fingers into Ingo's forearms hard enough to bruise. He sniffs wetly through his tears and tries to look at his brother through blurred vision. He's afraid if he closes his eyes to cry Ingo will be gone again when he opens them.

The defensiveness has fallen away from Ingo almost entirely, leaving him wide-eyed and frowning with concern, even if he hesitates like he isn't sure whether this is okay. He looks softer like this, younger, more like the Ingo Emmet remembers.

And Emmet can't help himself. If Ingo decides to deck him he can. Emmet lunges, tackling Ingo onto the bed in a hug, wrapping his arms tight around his middle and burying his face in his chest.

He's real. Solid and warm in his arms.

Ingo grunts, surprised, and for a moment he is stiff and uncertain. Then, slowly, so slowly, his arms come around to hug Emmet back, his grip tight and almost protective as his fingers curl against the back of Emmet's neck.

For the first time in over three years, Emmet feels himself truly relax. He sobs, gasping in a breath of Ingo's unfamiliar scent and hospital sterility. His body shudders. He can't help squeezing Ingo, digging his fingers in, just relishing in being able to touch his breathing, *living* brother. Emmet can hear his heartbeat, near his ear. Still a little fast, but sturdy and strong. He's real. He's real and he's alive and he's *here*.

Emmet is terrified that once he pulls away, he'll find that he was just dreaming (again) and is instead at home, cuddling up to Elesa or Eelektross. But Emmet feels the callouses on Ingo's fingers as he starts to card them through Emmet's hair, something foreign and new and not a detail he would ever dream up, and he melts into the touch.

His brother is here. Ingo is here.

Emmet cries harder into his shoulder, barely managing to breathe

around his hiccuping gasps.

Ingo is here. Ingo is *alive*. Emmet missed him so very much.

He isn't sure how long they stay like that—however long it is, it isn't long enough—before Emmet remembers that his brother was injured and probably shouldn't be used as a human couch right now. His bawling has petered off into a quieter, more exhausted sort of crying, so Emmet pulls back, reluctant to leave the embrace but wanting to make sure Ingo is all right. As he sits up on the hospital bed, he wipes messily at his face, just spreading the tears around.

Oh, he's shaking. Neat.

Then he looks up, and Ingo is watching him with—while maybe not *recognition*, certainly something soft and warm. Fond. His eyes are glassy with tears too, a few having made tracks down his cheeks.

"Safety check," Emmet rasps. He looks over Ingo's front, relieved to not find any blood. "I am sorry if I hurt you. I am not sorry for the hug."

Ingo huffs a quiet laugh, and if his brother's laugh wasn't his favorite sound *before* his disappearance, it certainly is now. Even when it is small and quiet. Emmet's smile grows.

"I have had worse," Ingo reassures, which is not very reassuring at *all*. "Are *you* all right?" His words are hesitant, falling clumsily from his lips. Like he's out of practice with their native language.

Still.

"Unovan!" Emmet cries, pointing excitedly at his brother.

"You know..? Oh," Ingo says, apparently registering his language switch. "Unovan, you say? Yes, it is…the language I woke up speaking. I haven't used it in a very long time. Forgive me if I am a bit, ah. Rusty. I switched tracks rather suddenly."

'Woke up' speaking? Woke up where? Woke up from what? Emmet has so many questions, but for now he stuffs them back down. They can wait until later. The real sticking point is that Ingo *just used a train metaphor*.

"You remember trains?!" Emmet demands, not sure if he should feel offended or thrilled by his brother remembering trains over his own

twin.

But Ingo just blinks back at him, face blank. “Trains?”

“You said you ‘switched tracks!’”

Ingo perks up. “Ah! Yes, I seem to use some rather odd turns of phrase, but I’m not entirely sure what they’re in reference to.”

Emmet stares at Ingo, his smile growing until a bark of laughter escapes. “Elesa is going to make fun of you until the end of time.”

“Elesa?”

Emmet’s laughter dies out as he tilts his head, hopeful despite himself. “Yes. Our sister. Tall. Gym leader. Likes yellow. Do you remember her?”

Ingo’s brow furrows as his gaze moves down to his lap, where calloused, scarred hands twist into the thin hospital blanket. “She sounds…vaguely familiar? I just can’t quite—"

Ingo cuts off with a hiss of pain, curling into himself. His hand moves up to clutch at his head. Behind Emmet, the espurr makes a shriek of warning.

“Ingo!” Emmet moves to—to do something, before realizing he doesn’t know *what* to do. Ingo is grabbing at his head. Maybe the lights are too much?

But just as soon as the pain arrived, it seems to fade, leaving behind a frustrated discomfort on his brother’s face.

“Apologies,” Ingo grunts. “That…happens sometimes. When I try too hard to recall.”

Emmet releases a shuddering breath, reaching out to put his hand on Ingo’s leg. The touch soothes something in him. Ingo is all right. Well, mostly all right.

“That is concerning,” Emmet says with a curt nod.

Ingo’s lips twitch. “That it is.”

Then Ingo’s gaze flicks over Emmet’s shoulder, settling on the espurr with a tired glare. “I do not like that Pokemon.”

Emmet twists around to look at the espurr, who is staring at them with an unnerving, dead-eyed stare. “I will grab a nurse. Maybe they can remove it.”

Emmet pokes his head into the hallway, reluctant to leave Ingo’s side but feeling that his brother’s comfort is worth the brief separation. He spots a nurse walking by with a clipboard under her arm, and Emmet waves her down. It’s not until she gets closer that Emmet realizes it’s the nurse from before, who called Ingo *unruly*. Emmet isn’t sure whether he should be angry about that or not, so he hesitantly leads her back to his brother.

When the nurse comes into the room, she crosses her arms and sighs. “Hello, Ingo.”

“Hello, ma’am,” Ingo returns politely, the picture of innocence.

“Are you going to make another run for it?” The nurse asks, voice tired. Ah, right, that is why the espurr is here.

Ingo, much to Emmet’s dismay, doesn’t answer immediately. His frown deepens, and he looks to Emmet almost hesitantly. “You, ah. You are not leaving, correct?”

Emmet shakes his head, hard enough to put stars in his eyes. He will not be letting Ingo out of his sight. Not unless his brother asks him to. Maybe not even then.

Ingo nods, clearly relieved. “Then I will stay as well.”

The nurse looks even more relieved than Ingo, waving the espurr to her side. She leaves again with the little creature toddling behind her, giving Emmet a stern warning to not let Ingo slip out the window. Again.

“*Again?”* Emmet asks, torn between hysterical laughter and requesting that the espurr come back to hold his brother down. They are on the eighth floor. Maybe “unruly” was more accurate than Emmet had thought.

Ingo has the good sense to at least look embarrassed, flushing and averting his eyes. His hand comes up, as if to pull his hat over his eyes, but fumbles awkwardly as he finds nothing there. Emmet is delighted and endeared and near tears all over again. He loves his brother so much.

“When did you become such a vagrant, brother?” Emmet finally says, settling on amused. Ingo is safe. He will just have to make sure he doesn’t try climbing out the window again.

“Brother,” Ingo echoes. He says it like a question, like a tentative hope, sitting there in his hospital gown and looking up at Emmet.

While his brother has obviously grown stronger over the past few years if the cords of muscle visible on his arms are anything to gauge by, he is also thinner. Combined with his lost expression and the scars, Emmet can’t help thinking that Ingo looks smaller, somehow. No, not smaller. Just…vulnerable. Emmet always saw him as infallible before his disappearance.

The shift is uncomfortable. Ingo had always been more protective of Emmet than the other way around, his older brother taking their birth order seriously. But now, Emmet feels his own protectiveness rear up, fierce as a mother tyranitar.

“Brother,” Ingo repeats, softly, testing the word as he stares at Emmet. “Are we twins?”

Despite the way Emmet’s heart breaks at that question, he laughs, tears building in his eyes. “Ingo. We have the same face. Yes, we are twins.”

Ingo makes a thoughtful sound, his frown deepening. Emmet is about to panic (does Ingo not *want* to be his twin anymore?), but Ingo simply says, “Zoroark are cruel creatures.”

Emmet blinks, smile dropping completely. He can’t remember *ever* hearing his brother deem an entire species of Pokemon as cruel. It’s all about the individual Pokemon, or the trainer who raises them.

“You mentioned a zoroark earlier,” Emmet hedges, sitting down on the edge of Ingo’s bed. He glances at Ingo’s hand, wanting to take it and hold on tight, but not wanting to push his luck.

Ingo’s expression goes dark, and his gaze drifts down to his forearm, where a notable set of scars span his brother’s skin, long since healed. They look like claw marks from something *large*, deep stripes of dented flesh.

Emmet swallows against a wave of nausea, trying not to imagine how much that must’ve hurt, or how much his brother must have bled, and instead pictures it with such perfect clarity that he isn’t sure whether

he wants to scream or cry or go out and fight someone.

They aren't the only scars on Ingo. There are so many. Too many. Small ones covering his arms and hands, broken up by the occasional larger, more gruesome mark. Emmet thinks he might have even spotted one peeking out from beneath the hospital gown, near his brother's collarbone

Emmet really wants to hold Ingo's hand.

"Did a zoroark do that?" Emmet asks instead, pointing at Ingo's arm. It seems strange—zoroark can be tricksters but are rarely so violent, especially without good reason.

Unless it was at a trainer's orders. Fury rushes through Emmet at the thought, but he tamps down on it as Ingo hums.

"Yes. A month or so after I woke up in Hisui." Emmet makes a mental note of that. Hisui? So he wasn't in Sinnoh? "I was patrolling the Alabaster Iceland border later than usual, and was tricked by one of zoroark's illusions. Lady Sneasler saved me then, too."

Okay, there is. A lot to unpack there. Patrolling? Tricked by a zoroark's illusion? Lady Sneasler? So he presumably wasn't held captive or anything, then.

Thank Arceus. One of Emmet's worst nightmares laid to rest.

Ingo does, however, look upset at mention of this Lady Sneasler, fingers moving to fiddle with the unfamiliar wooden bracelet around his wrist. His eyes grow distant, something unbearably sad in his expression.

Before Emmet can decide how to respond, Ingo shakes his head and looks back at Emmet. "I apologize for being so aggressive when you first arrived. After the first illusion was such a success, the zoroark passed word around and would often torment me with visions of you."

Emmet blinks, struck. "Of…me?"

Ingo nods, looking almost ashamed as he averts his eyes. "I…I could not remember your name, before arriving at this station. Or who you were to me. I still don't truly recall our relationship. But the zoroark always picked you to try and lure me to my death. A man dressed in white, with my face."

Emmet stares at Ingo. He's not even sure what mix of emotions he's feeling right now. Some small part of him is weirdly touched that of all things a zoroark chose to show Ingo to try and lure him close, they picked Emmet.

But another part of him is too horrified to speak, because it *worked*.

No wonder his brother looked so terrified when Emmet showed up in his hospital room. He'd shown up before and beckoned him close before slicing his arm open and presumably trying to *kill him*. He knows if he'd seen Ingo anywhere over the last three years, even in the darkest of alleys, he would've ran to him in an instant. He can't imagine doing so and getting his arm shredded in return by something with his brother's face.

Oh. Apparently he is going to be sick. Great.

"Excuse me for a moment," Emmet says calmly, getting up to power-walk to the bathroom, where he promptly kneels at the toilet to puke.

He hates throwing up, always has. He used to avoid doing so when sick even when he was told it would make him feel better. But now he just lets it happen, losing his hasty breakfast in the bowl. Emmet takes a moment to breathe after that, idly reaching up to flush the toilet. He hates every inhale of rancid breath he takes as he rests his head against the cold (hopefully sterile) bowl of the toilet.

He hopes this room has complimentary mouth wash.

Ingo's hand rubs at his back, making Emmet jump. He hadn't even heard his brother follow him in here. When he glances over his shoulder, Ingo is watching him with concern. Or maybe guilt.

"I apologize."

"Not your fault," Emmet mumbles, rubbing at his face before pushing himself up—ugh, his stomach feels gross now—and moving to the cabinet to look for mouthwash. After a moment he finds it, making a pleased victory hum as he cracks it open and does three or four rinses.

Ingo watches curiously from the bathroom floor.

Oh Arceus, his brother is hurt and should not be up, let alone just sitting on the bathroom floor.

Emmet urges Ingo to his feet, guiding the two of them back over to

the hospital bed. Ingo looks reluctant to lie down again, so Emmet just plops both of them down on the edge, side-by-side.

“I apologize,” Ingo says again, looking deeply upset. Like it’s *his* fault that Emmet just puked from sheer horror alone.

“Do not apologize,” Emmet say, a little sharper than he means to. He reaches over and takes Ingo’s hand before he can second-guess himself, relieved when his brother laces their fingers together and squeezes. “I should be sorry. I do not blame you for looking so scared when I showed up today.“

“I realized fairly quickly that you couldn’t be an illusion. You were crying. They never did that.”

Oh, look at that. He’s blinking back tears again. So dehydrated. “I am still sorry.”

“The zoroark are a spiteful bunch,” Ingo sighs. “The only one I have seen show humans anything like affection is Akari’s—"

Ingo’s head snaps up, eyes going wide before flicking to the corner of the room where the espurr was previously sitting.

Emmet frowns at his twin. “What?”

“The tracks are cleared!” Ingo almost shouts, and between the phrasing—he’s using *train metaphors* again—and his voice finally raising to something like his old volume, Emmet is immediately fighting off tears again. Happy tears, but still.

However, Ingo then stands, yanking Emmet to his feet as well (holy *shit* his brother is strong now) and darting for the door. He stops in the hallway before Emmet can protest or wrangle him in.

“Do you know where Akari is stationed?” Ingo asks, almost frantic as he looks around.

Emmet blinks, puzzled smile firmly in place. He thinks he heard that name before, but… “I do not know an Akari.”

“The healer said she was here as well, and I—I need to see that she is all right,” Ingo explains, clearly about to bolt again.

Oh. Probably the girl from the video, then. Emmet tightens his grip and uses his other hand to grab Ingo’s shoulder, turning him to lock

eyes. “Ingo. Breathe. If this Akari is here we can ask for help to find her.” His eyes flick down to Ingo’s bare feet on the tile floor. He’s trembling in the cold of the hospital. Or maybe with emotion. “You should stay in bed. You are injured.”

A brief flash of something—Defiance? Anger?—flickers through Ingo’s expression like a flame. “I must see her.”

He tries to lean back, pulling away from Emmet ever so slightly, but even that is enough for Emmet to tighten his grip and desperately follow.

“I will ask,” Emmet says, firm. “I will help you. Just—“ his monotone falters and breaks for a moment. “Just don’t leave me behind. Please.”

That seems to stall Ingo’s frenzy. He softens, all the fight draining out of him as he looks back at Emmet. Finally, he sighs. “You are correct. I apologize for my hasty exit. Could you ask?”

Ingo was always the one who talked, much more comfortable and expressive with his voice, but Emmet nods. He had to get better at talking over the past three years.

Besides, he would do anything for Ingo.

So Emmet tugs Ingo down the hall until they run into a nurse to ask. The nurse gives Ingo in his hospital gown a hesitant look, like she’s torn between sending him back to his room or helping, but the desperate look in his eyes seems to be enough. She says she can check in on this Akari, and bring word if they get permission to visit. A few minutes later, she returns with the affirmative. Ingo squeezes Emmet’s hand in a death grip as the nurse leads the two of them to the right door. It’s already propped open.

Ingo steps up to the doorway of the room and stops, as if frozen in place. Emmet peers over his shoulder and spots the room’s occupant sitting up in bed.

It is the girl from the video. A teenager, no older than 16 or 17, with long navy hair. She’s bundled up in a thicker blanket than the designated hospital sheet, and wearing a huge, comfy hoodie and some sweatpants. She’s muttering to herself, squinting at a device in her hands. Something about “Getting this damn thing to work when I literally had a cell phone from God.”

Huh.

“Language,” Ingo says, more a fond greeting than a scolding. Emmet blinks, surprised by the warmth in his brother’s tone.

The teenager’s head snaps up to look at them, gray eyes wide. It’s then that Emmet notices the long scar slicing from the top of her cheek bone down and across the corner of her mouth.

“Uncle!” The girl cries, all delight, before flinging the covers off and sprinting over to leap at Ingo. She hits him like a komala, wrapping her arms and legs around his middle to bury her face in his shoulder. If Emmet wasn’t so startled by the greeting (*Uncle?*), he would’ve been more concerned about an entire teenager tackling his injured brother.

As it is, Ingo doesn’t even step back to balance himself, simply swaying to accommodate the girl’s weight before settling again, like she is no heavier than one of Emmet’s joltiks.

Holy shit, Emmet thinks again, a little wildly. Ingo is apparently jacked. Elesa is going to lose her mind.

Ingo laughs—a full, loud laugh that makes Emmet’s heart soar— and hugs the girl in return, kissing the top of her head. “I am glad to see you are all right.”

For a beat Emmet feels intensely jealous. Their reunion had Ingo white as a sheet and ready to fight for his life, and Emmet wishes it could have been more like this meeting, more like this reunion between his brother and a stranger. But his bitterness dies as quickly as it arrived, because Ingo just looks so *happy*. His brother’s eyes are crinkled and the corners of his lips are upturned in his version of a beaming smile.

Still, Emmet can’t help piping up. “He is injured. Please refrain from causing unnecessary stops in Ingo’s future.”

The girl—Akari?—squeaks and releases her hold to land clumsily on her feet. She spins to look at Emmet with something like awe, whispering, “The man in white. Ingo, you found him!”

Akari turns to hug Ingo’s side again, shaking him in excitement as she shrieks into his hospital gown. Emmet is also a little jealous of all the hugs Akari is getting.

But then he realizes Ingo is waiting for him to speak.

“I am Emmet,” he confirms. “And I am verrrrry happy to see my

brother again." He gives her his most genuine smile, the one that actually reaches his eyes. It's not hard now, with Ingo back at his side.

"I'm so glad you two found each other!" The girl gushes. "Oh, I'm Akari by the way. Well, legally I guess I'm Dawn? But either one works. Anyways, I'm super happy to meet you!"

Emmet sticks his hand out for a handshake as Akari—Dawn?—bows, and he almost smacks her in the face. Whoops.

Luckily, Akari just laughs and straightens up, still beaming. "I always knew Uncle Ingo would find his way back to you." Then she gasps and spins to look at Ingo again. "Wait, does this mean you got your memories back?"

Ingo grimaces, shooting Emmet a guilty glance. Emmet wants to reassure him that it's all right, but he isn't sure how to do so in a way that doesn't sound like a lie.

(It's not really all right, is it?)

"Unfortunately," Ingo says. "No. I recall Emmet's name, but little else."

"Oh. Well, that's okay!" Akari says, her cheer only a little strained. "I know I didn't forget nearly as much as you, but the doctors said it might take some time for me to recover the rest of my memories. So maybe yours will work the same way!"

"Optimistic as ever, I see," Ingo chuckles. Then he turns to Emmet, crossing his arms behind his back. The formal pose looks funny when Ingo is dressed in nothing but a hospital gown. "Miss Akari was an invaluable ally during my time in Hisui. By far the best battler in the region."

Emmet perks up, eyeing the girl with renewed interest. A battler. He should've expected as much, with his brother.

"You say that like battling is all we did, you nerd!" Akari laughs, bright and cheery. She grins at Emmet. "Uncle Ingo also kept an eye out for me when I was in the Highlands and listened to me complain about all the modern amenities I missed. He even helped me finish the pokedex so we could get home!"

Ingo is clearly embarrassed at the praise, waving Akari's words off with a humble rebuttal about only helping her gather a few unruly

passengers.

Emmet, however, is stalling at Akari's words. Why would completing a pokedex allow them to come home? How did they not have "modern amenities?"

What comes out of Emmet's mouth is a blunt, "Where were you?"

Akari's lively gestures and happy smile fade, and she looks first at Emmet, then Ingo, with surprise. "You…didn't tell him about Hisui?"

"Our cars were only recoupled a short while ago," Ingo explains. "Once I was able to, I wanted to make sure you were safe. Until now, I was unable to leave my station."

"They had a psychic Pokemon guarding him because he tried to climb out a window," Emmet adds, still not sure if he finds that whole thing funny or unsettling.

"We're on the eighth floor!" Akari exclaims with a scolding look.

"Thank you!" Emmet says, giving the girl ten points in his mind, solely for being a voice of reason for his brother's safety.

"I was worried," Ingo defends. "They had taken my Pokemon, would not let me see you, and there was a guard posted at my station. I had to assume the worst."

Akari winces, seeming smaller as she looks down at her fuzzy pink socks. "…Okay, fair point."

What? No, not a fair point. They are in a *hospital.* Of course Akari was kept safe. "I do not like being left out of this ominous conversation. Why would this be a 'fair point?'"

Akari cringes, and Ingo sighs, rough and angry. For a heart-wrenching moment Emmet fears that *he* has made Ingo angry.

(What did those tabloids say about Emmet? He was too blunt, unnatural and uncaring and—

And he does care. He cares so much. That's why he wants to know.)

But Ingo's gaze is distant as he looks to the window, cracked open to let a fresh breeze spill into the room. "Let's just say that young Akari has been forced to deal with far too much at her age. I would like to keep her from having to repeat such events if possible."

As Akari moves to hug Ingo again, Emmet's eyes flick down to the long scar across her face. If he looks closer at her small fingers, twisting into his brother's hospital gown, he sees more scars criss-crossing her skin.

Ah. She is like his brother, then. Whatever he went through that left him so…

(Jumpy? Aggressive? Afraid? Hurt.)

Happened to this child as well. Their relationship makes more sense now.

"But we're home now," Akari says, voice muffled. "We did it."

"*You* did it," Ingo corrects softly, petting her hair. He seems unbearably sad and proud all at once. Then he looks to Emmet. "Akari is the only reason I was able to reach this station. Without her, I would have never been able to make the return trip."

In response, Emmet stares. Something in his gut chills and turns over.

If one thing holds true from the Ingo of over three years ago, it is that he doesn't exaggerate. Not when he is serious. He doesn't lie. Especially not to Emmet. If he says that he never would have made it home without this girl, there is a 99% chance he wouldn't have.

And Emmet would still be alone right now. Wondering if Ingo was lying dead somewhere, his body being picked apart by wild Pokemon.

Distantly, Emmet notes to give Akari 10,000 points, nudging her up from a tentative acquaintance Emmet has to like for his brother's sake to someone he would willingly throw himself on the tracks for. Good for her.

The rest of Emmet shuts down as Ingo's words ring through his skull. Ingo could have never made it back home. If not for the child in front of him, his brother would be *gone*. Not dead, perhaps, a small comfort, but out of Emmet's orbit until his own death.

The thought of decades without his brother, of only continuing that vicious, endless game of waking up and trying not to think about Ingo, then feeling guilty for not thinking about Ingo, of searching and wondering and hoping and despairing and gazing just a little too long at the third rail of the subway tracks, wondering how much it would hurt before the voltage killed him—

That cycle would *never end*.

Emmet barely made it three years. He wouldn't have made it another sixty. Hell, he doubts he would have made it another two.

Hm. Emmet thinks he's having a panic attack.

It's the last coherent thought he has before his mind goes off the tracks.

And then.

And then.

And then.

Emmet comes back to himself.

Slowly.

Starting at the feeling of heat under his palms and fingertips. His hands are held by a gentler kind of warmth, calloused but soft as a thumb gently strokes at his knuckles. The touch feels nice. Soothing. Like Ingo used to do.

Ingo.

Where was Emmet this time? He's no stranger to having the occasional panic attack in instances linked to Ingo's disappearance. They've lessened in frequency over time, but Emmet is still familiar with the feeling of coming back to himself, his senses filtering in one at a time. The breeze that drifts against his back makes him shiver.

Smell comes next—cheap coffee and something antibacterial. Cold and medical. Ah, right. He was at…a hospital? Why was he at a hospital? Did he collapse again? But no, he's sitting up, not lying down. And they wouldn't give him coffee if that was the case. Not that he wants it anyways. Coffee is gross. Only good for warmth and smelling.

Sound filters in then, registering in his ears as soft murmurs across the room. Distantly, there is the occasional beep of machines, or a door opening and closing. There's someone in front of him, too, breathing deep and calming breaths.

Finally, Emmet's vision clears enough for him to blink, lifting his head to see his surroundings. And right in front of him, inches from his face

with a worried frown and searching gray eyes, is Ingo.

Emmet freezes, the smile he had been trying to pull onto his face falling again. His mind stutters like a faulty engine.

Ingo.

Ingo?

Ingo!

The memory slams back into his mind. Ingo is back, Ingo has lost his own memory and has been through something awful but he is *here* and safe and alive.

For a moment Emmet just stares at Ingo as fresh tears spring to his eyes and drip down his face, blurring his vision. He tries to blink them away so he can keep seeing his brother, but that just makes it worse.

Then there are gentle hands (familiar unfamiliar hands, a touch like coming home but marred by callouses and scars) removing the coffee from his crushing grip and Ingo is pulling him in for a hug. Emmet clings to Ingo, wrapping his arms tight around his torso, and his emotions break the dam. He hiccups, then sobs, turning his head to wail into his brother's shoulder, rocking with the force of his grief and relief. Ingo murmurs reassurances, holding him just as tight and rocking with him as he pets Emmet's hair.

"I-I'm sorry," Emmet says, then repeats it. Over and over again. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry—"

"Why are you sorry?" Ingo asks, sounding baffled.

Emmet shakes his head, unsure how to put it into words. He's sorry for having a panic attack and making Ingo comfort him when *Ingo* is the one who was dragged off and put through something terrible. He's sorry for moving on enough to live without Ingo. He's sorry for never allowing himself to be happy without his brother by his side. He's sorry he couldn't help Ingo, wherever he was. He's sorry he's a terrible brother who was jealous that Akari was getting hugs and not him and he's sorry that he thought about ending it a few times, just on the off chance that Ingo might be waiting for him in the afterlife, and—

Ingo makes a noise like a wounded Pokemon, somehow holding Emmet even tighter, enough that it almost hurts. If it wasn't the only thing holding him together right now, Emmet would ask him to loosen

his grip.

“Never think about doing that again,” Ingo demands, voice shaking. Emmet must have said that last part out loud. “Please, Emmet, I—I do not remember much, but I know that it would destroy me if you were ever hurt. *Please*.”

If that was supposed to make Emmet *stop* crying, it does the opposite. For the second time today, he shakes apart in his brother’s arms. This time, Ingo is trembling as well, clutching back just as desperately.

It isn’t until Emmet starts choking on his own tears and snot (gross), pulling away just enough to cough and catch his breath, that Ingo’s tight grip loosens. He hands Emmet a cold water bottle, and Emmet gratefully accepts, sipping at it as his gaze flicks over Ingo’s shoulder, noticing movement.

Emmet is surprised to see Akari and another woman—older, but with the same hair color and bright eyes, perhaps her mother—in the room as well, seated on a couch near the doorway. Akari is lying down with her head in the woman’s lap, messing with the Xtransceiver again and sending he and Ingo the occasional fretting glance. The older woman is looking at her phone while she strokes her daughter’s hair.

Right, they have company. Some part of Emmet actually likes that the two of them didn’t even pretend to leave to give them privacy, just for how honest the action is. They are still putting up the silly, flimsy act of not paying attention, though, which is kind of funny. The rest of him is just…resigned to the fact that they no doubt saw Emmet break down. Wonderful.

Still, he supposes if Ingo is so fond of Akari, he needs to try to be polite.

“Hello,” Emmet greets, cringing at his ruined voice. “I am Emmet.”

Ingo leans back, eyes red and wet and brow raised like he’s asking Emmet if he really wants to bring someone else into a conversation right now.

He does not. He wants to go back to Ingo’s room and lie down with his brother and nap. But Ingo is clearly more at ease with Akari in the room, so Emmet will play nice and socialize.

Akari doesn’t seem sure what to say, instead offering him a weak smile and a little wave. He waves back.

The older woman puts down her phone and smiles at him, too, though Emmet finds that he relates to her smile more than he would like. He saw it so many times in the mirror over the past three years. Tired and strained and trying so, so hard to be okay.

“Hello,” the woman greets, voice soft. “My name is Johanna. I’m Dawn’s mother.”

“I am sorry for that trainwreck,” Emmet says. “It has…been a long three and a half years.”

“Trust me,” Johanna laughs, shaking her head. “If there’s anyone who understands, it’s me.”

“I was gone two years,” Akari adds, seeing Emmet’s confused smile. Ah, she can read him fairly well, then. Ten more points to Akari.

He also supposes Johanna is right, then. If anyone is going to understand him, understand losing a loved one right under their nose to something unknown, something they couldn’t stop, desperately hoping and waiting for them to return, it would be this mother.

Emmet reaches out and takes Ingo’s hand. His brother gives him a fond look and squeezes in return, which makes Emmet’s heart flutter happily.

“I missed you,” Emmet says, unable to keep the words in anymore, audience or no.

Ingo flushes, but a pleased smile tugs at his lips regardless. “If the zoroark are anything to gauge by, then I missed you as well, Emmet.”

Emmet beams.

Now all they need is their Pokemon—unfortunately waiting back at the hotel for them—and Elesa, and they’ll be back together again. Complete. Emmet is deliriously glad that Elesa grabbed Chandelure’s pokeball. Hopefully Ingo will not be too upset with Emmet for not being able to get her to eat.

Wait. Elesa.

“Elesa is still waiting to see you,” Emmet says, watching Ingo carefully. Last time he brought up Elesa, it ended with his brother hunched over in pain. He does not want that to happen again.

Ingo seems surprised. “She is here?”

“Downstairs,” Emmet confirms with a nod, free hand curling into his pant leg. Although after Ingo’s initial reaction to Emmet, maybe keeping it to one person *was* a good idea. “She would like to see you, if you are not out of steam yet.”

Ingo tilts his head, looking curious. It’s a step up from most of the emotions he’s seen on his brother’s face today. “She came with you?”

Emmet nods again. “From Unova. It was a verrrrry long flight.”

To Emmet’s surprise, Ingo pulls back with obvious shock. “Flight? You —we are not from this region?”

Emmet’s smile falters. “No. We are from Unova. This is Sinnoh.”

For a moment Ingo looks unsettled at this information, glancing at Akari. The girl shrugs in return.

Finally, Ingo nods. “I…I would like to see her. You called her our… sister, yes?”

Emmet nods again, perking up despite his exhaustion. “She declared herself our sister when we were ten.”

At that, Ingo huffs a laugh. Emmet doesn’t know what is so funny, but he's happy that his brother is happy.

“I will bring her up. If that is okay.” Emmet states more than asks.

Ingo glances behind him again, to Akari and Johanna. A question. The older woman defers to her daughter.

“I’m fine with that, but I’d…rather not leave Ingo right now,” Akari says, hesitant. “Is it okay if we stay?”

Ah. Emmet nods, understanding. He does not want to leave Ingo, either. Plus, they can watch over his brother while he grabs Elesa. The idea of leaving his brother’s side for even a moment is nerve-wracking (Oh, *hello trauma!*), but Emmet doesn’t think they’ll let Elesa up if he does not go retrieve her himself.

“Please watch over my brother,” Emmet says as he stands. “Do not let him climb out any windows. I will be back on the first available stop.”

Ingo gives Emmet an unimpressed glare. Akari giggles while Johanna

looks concerned.

“You do the train stuff, too,” Akari adds, looking delighted.

“Of course! We are the Subway Masters,” Emmet declares, proudly. He is verrrrry happy to be able to say that again. Subway Masters. Plural.

Ingo does not appear particularly struck by the title, but he does glance at what looks like wooden poke ball replicas placed upon the nearby desk. “Could you perhaps also ask about my Pokemon? I would like to be recoupled with them as well.”

Emmet pauses, surprised despite himself. Ingo had mentioned battling Akari, and Emmet saw for himself on that video that Ingo had caught at least a gliscor in his absence, but the question still throws him for a loop. Ingo already has a team. But Emmet supposes that now he has two.

They are going to need to buy more pokechow.

But Emmet nods and promises to ask about them as well, and Ingo slumps, clearly relieved. Emmet gives Ingo’s hand one more squeeze, ignoring his brother’s uncertain expression and promising to be right back.

When Emmet strides into the hall, he waits until he spots a free nurse, requesting to bring up a second visitor and to retrieve Ingo’s Pokemon. The nurse peeks into Akari’s room where Ingo is chatting with the girl, calm and content, and agrees to go with Emmet to retrieve Elesa, stopping at a room along the way and returning with a plastic container of six of the same wood-and-stone Pokeballs sitting inside, along with instructions to not allow Ingo to release them indoors.

Emmet nods distractedly, taking the tray and staring at the strange pokeballs. Not replicas, then. He has never seen anything like them, aside from perhaps a history book when they were in school.

Strange.

Still, for now Emmet puts it out of mind and slips the container carefully into his coat pocket for safekeeping. He follows the nurse back to the waiting area, where Elesa is collapsed in one of the uncomfortable chairs circling the room, chin in her hands and eyes closed.

She must be as exhausted as he is.

“Elesa,” he calls.

The gym leader snaps up, looking to him with wide, hopeful eyes. “Emmet!”

Emmet’s smile grows. He waves her over. She hurries to oblige, grabbing her purse and clicking to his side in her heels.

“Is it Ingo? Of course it is, you wouldn’t look so happy otherwise. Is he okay?”

Emmet just nods in response, taking Elesa’s hand when she bursts into tears. He pulls her along, following the nurse back to the elevator to reach the correct floor. Then it’s just the two of them inside, slowly ascending. Elesa wipes at her running mascara, her purse gripped tightly in her free hand.

“It is Ingo,” Emmet confirms. Elesa laughs, wet and messy and so, so happy. “He…does not remember much, and he is injured, but it is him all the same.”

Elesa nods, taking a breath and glancing at the changing numbers on the wall, as if she could make the elevator go faster. Her free hand finds his, cold and clammy, and squeezes. He squeezes back.

“He remembered my name,” Emmet continues, the words spilling out. “But…verrrrry little else. I told him about you.”

Elesa catches his warning, luckily, her face setting into something a bit more braced. Like she’s trying to put up a wall to make it hurt less when Ingo does not recognize her. Emmet squeezes her hand again, thumb rubbing over one of her glossy manicured nails.

Finally, they reach the eighth floor. Emmet guides Elesa to Akari’s room, only realizing he probably should have warned her about the girl and her mother when she gives the name tag by the door a confused look.

Oh well. No changing tracks now.

He and Elesa enter the room, the gym leader stumbling to an uncharacteristically clumsy stop as soon as she sees Ingo sitting on the bed by Akari. He is looking curiously at the girl’s device as she explains something in Sinnohan. The two of them cut off and look up

at their entrance, and Emmet swears he sees something like recognition flash across his brother's face, though it is marred by his furrowed brow.

"Ah, you are…Elesa, yes?"

Elesa is just staring at Ingo, chin trembling as the shine in her eyes finally overflows, tears dripping more mascara down her cheeks.

Ingo jolts, looking concerned, and glances frantically at Emmet. "I apologize, I—"

He is cut off as Elesa darts forward and tackles him into a hug, much like Emmet had earlier. Akari grins, scooting back to avoid Ingo's flailing arm as he tries to steady himself.

"You idiot," Elesa sobs, tucking her face into Ingo's shoulder and hiding there as her back shakes. "Don't *apologize*. Just hug me back, damn it!"

Ingo does, arms slowly coming around to hold Elesa closer, rubbing at her back as he murmurs yet another apology. Emmet isn't sure if it is grief or joy overwhelming him at the sight of Elesa losing herself in Ingo's hold, but sure enough he's crying too, though his smile is firmly in place.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Ingo and Akari recall their time in Hisui.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Where *were* you?” Elesa finally demands, after a solid ten minutes of smearing tears and makeup onto the shoulder of Ingo’s hospital gown.

Now, she sits at their brother’s side, holding one of his hands. Her eyeliner and mascara is a streaky mess of black on her face, but she doesn’t seem to care, instead cradling the water bottle Emmet had handed her to take calming sips from. Emmet has taken up station on Ingo’s other side to hold his free hand. Akari has moved back over to her mother on the couch in order to make room.

Elesa is staring at Ingo with a furrowed brow. Emmet sees how her gaze flicks from his gaunt cheekbones down to the scars on Ingo’s arms, something like fear in her tight expression. Right. Emmet does not know a lot, but he still knows more than Elesa.

Not that it soothes his worries much.

“Ah,” Ingo says, hesitant. He looks to Akari and then Johanna, almost questioning.

“I already told Mom,” Akari says with a shrug. Ingo gives her an incredulous look and she winces, glancing at her mother before away again. “W-Well. I gave her the shortened version.”

Johanna seems upset but not surprised by this, curving an arm around her daughter to tuck her close to her side.

“In that case,” Ingo says, slowly, still looking at Akari. Waiting. “I… shall give the long version, I suppose.”

Akari bites her lip, but nods her approval. Johanna pulls Akari close and wraps the two of them up in the thick blanket Emmet had spotted earlier, trying to get comfortable on the stiff hospital couch.

Ingo takes a deep, bracing breath, and starts to speak. “I…woke up in

the middle of a blizzard. I had no idea where I was and little idea of *who* I was. All I had was my name."

Oh. This story is going to hurt, Emmet thinks, distantly, as he listens with rapt attention to where exactly his brother has been.

Ingo explains that over three years ago he found himself in Hisui—the Sinnoh of ancient past—with no memories. Emmet would be more skeptical of this idea if he did not already know that Ingo doesn't lie about serious matters. Especially not to Emmet.

Plus, Emmet had handed the pokeballs that contained Ingo's new team back to his brother, who looked so relieved to have them in his hands again. Wood-and-stone pokeballs, with a latch. Ancient pokeballs, two hundred years out of date. Emmet has only seen them before in history books.

For a moment Emmet tries to wrap his head around Ingo's seemingly-impossible scenario, but all his brain can focus on is that his brother was right earlier. If Akari hadn't brought them home however she apparently did, there is a very good chance Ingo would have never returned. He was not only in another part of the world, but another *time*. He would have been dead long before he and Emmet were even born.

It takes a lot of careful breathing and Ingo talking him down to avoid the second panic attack of the day. Elesa doesn't look much better, pale as the implications of Ingo's situation sink in. She stumbles to the bathroom after a minute, and for a moment Emmet assumes she has to puke too. But no, she doesn't close the door, keeps Ingo in sight as she splashes water over her face and grips the sink with white knuckles.

Emmet can relate.

Once they are somewhat calm again, they're told a mildly horrifying tale of Ingo's first year and a half in Hisui, in which there are far too many casual mentions of near-death experiences for Emmet's heart to handle. Wild Pokemon attacks from giant ferals called "alphas." Narrowly avoiding rockslides and falling from the Highland cliffs. Bouts of illness and injury without the safety net of today's advanced medicine.

But somehow that isn't the worst part, even as Emmet can't seem to tear his eyes away from the scars on Ingo's arms and the one definitely peeking out from the collar of his hospital gown.

(This is why his brother is so quiet now, isn't it? He had to learn to quiet his voice, or die for it.)

Even more haunting is the loneliness in Ingo's tone as he details his time living in the Highlands. Sure, he had Irida and this Pearl Clan, when they occasionally made contact with one another, and Lady Sneasler and Melli, but there's something wistful in Ingo's voice that makes Emmet *ache*.

His brother had been alone, with only his Pokemon for company.

Ingo and Emmet were never apart for so long. It was rare for them to be apart for longer than a day, before this. Emmet was always by Ingo's side, and Ingo was always at Emmet's. Two halves of a whole. They could never be lonely because they had each other. And Elesa, and Gear Station, and all of Nimbasa.

But his brother was dropped into an unfamiliar world where he was expected to do his warden duties in exchange for the minimum of human kindness, just expected to *survive* without training or safety protocol or even a Pokemon of his own. Expected to live isolated and alone up in the mountains, without much contact with other humans.

It makes sense now how Ingo speaks of his Pokemon—reverently, gratefully, like a soothing balm, like a saving grace, like they were the only thing keeping him tethered. And that is very likely true. Both in the sense of his brother's sanity as well as his physical safety.

Emmet presses his forehead into his brother's shoulder, hoping to comfort and be comforted all at once. Ingo leans into the touch.

"Do we need to take a break?" Ingo asks Emmet. His voice is a bit hoarse, and Akari tosses him another water bottle that he catches in one hand, hardly bothering to look.

Emmet takes a grounding breath. He's tempted to say yes, but he doesn't want Ingo to lose his momentum. He wants to know everything his brother went through before coming back to him. So he shakes his head.

"Are you sure?"

"It is just…a lot," Emmet explains. "I am verrrrry worried about you. And it is hard to hear about everything that happened to you, even if you made it back."

“Not in one piece, though,” Elesa grumbles, giving Ingo’s arm a glare where a scar in the shape of large Pokemon teeth sits, white and stark against lightly tanned skin.

Ingo hums as he follows her gaze, thoughtful. “Yes, I suppose in many ways Hisui could be seen as harsh.”

“*Harsh?*” Elesa snaps. Emmet can see new tears shining in her eyes. “You were fighting off feral crobat with your bare hands!”

Ingo blinks at her, as if not seeing the issue. “Ah…yes? Everyone was, unless they had a Pokemon partner. Gliscor made sure to settle the score with that particular passenger.”

Before Elesa can really get going, Akari cuts in for the first time. Unlike Ingo, she actually looks like she understands Elesa’s outburst, giving them a sympathetic smile. Maybe because she remembers enough of the present to know how different it is nowadays.

“That’s just how it was back then. Other than the clan leaders, Ingo and I were two of the only people who even felt comfortable enough with Pokemon to keep them at our side. Definitely two of the only people who battled for fun and not just to avoid dying.”

Johanna looks pained, holding Akari tighter and dipping her head to plant a kiss on her daughter’s hair.

Elesa seems even more upset at that, but rubs at her face and nods. “Right. Right, I’m sorry, it’s just…I hate hearing that you got so hurt. It’s terrifying to think about.”

Emmet nods against Ingo’s shoulder and thinks of that video Volkner sent to him, seeing it in a new light. Thinks of Ingo and Akari both rushing straight at that steelix, dodging and moving with their Pokemon like it was second nature.

Ingo seems lost on how to comfort them. “I apologize if I seem insensitive. As I remember very little from this time, I suppose Hisui is just my baseline for how the world works.”

And isn’t that horrifying? To hear that his kind brother was thrown into a desolate mountain landscape and just expected to sink or swim. And that now he thinks that is *normal*.

No wonder he looked so defensive and ready to fight when Emmet first showed up. No wonder he was so worried about Akari. No

wonder he tried to escape this place where he didn't know or trust anyone. Emmet can't blame him one bit.

If Ingo hadn't adapted to Hisui, he never would have survived it. *He almost didn't*, Emmet thinks, cataloguing the scars on his brother's arms and legs and matching them up to the vague but horrifying stories he has already been told.

The zoroark clawmarks taking up the entirety of one forearm, disappearing under Ingo's two bracelets. The crobat bite encircling the other arm. The healed gash near his knee from almost plummeting to his death on the cliffsides. The crooked pinky and ring finger where his bones didn't heal right, broken during his escape from a rampaging electivire. The faint scar on his temple from where he hit his head during a mudslide that Lady Sneasler managed to pull him from.

Emmet is sure now that Ingo has plenty more scars hidden under his hospital gown. He doesn't want to know about those, although he's sure he will make himself ask, later. He has the nauseating feeling his brother is still holding back, still keeping the worst encounters from them.

"Are you sure you want me to continue?" Ingo asks, looking between Emmet and Elesa's mirrored expressions of pain.

Emmet nods again as Elesa says, "I—we need to know, Ingo."

Ingo purses his lips, glancing at the mother and daughter occupying the couch. "Then I suppose we continue on to our next stop."

"When we met!" Akari says with a grin.

Ingo nods, a matching smile clear in his voice. "When we met."

Akari steps in then, sitting up from her mother's lap to give them a slightly more abridged version of her own arrival to Hisui ("You texted *God?!"* Elesa exclaims five minutes in, sending Emmet into hysterical laughter). She tells them of an alarmingly similar situation to Ingo's, of being told to carry her weight or get sent out into the wilds on her own.

She was only 15 when she arrived in Hisui, and without any of her Pokemon. A child. She is *still* a child now, two years later.

Johanna, who Emmet guesses has already heard at least some of this,

doesn't have a near-breakdown like Emmet and Elesa did, but it's clear she's still deeply upset by how her daughter was treated, despite how warmly the girl speaks of some of the people like Professor Laventon and Rei and Cylene, as well as Irida and a man named Adaman.

It's not until Akari starts to explain her part in quelling the frenzied nobles that the disbelief and tension in the room overflows. From the way Akari looks nervously at her mother and how Johanna is taking measured breaths across the room, Emmet guesses Akari hadn't gone quite this in-depth yet in her own retelling of Hisui. The girl glances often at Ingo, as if drawing strength from his presence.

"Okay, hold on a second," Elesa finally says, cutting Akari off after she reluctantly admits that the deep scar across her face was from an encounter with an ancient scyther evolution called kleavor.

It must have bled horribly. Head and face wounds always do. A few inches difference and she would have lost an eye. And in ancient Hisui, the medical practices couldn't have been nearly as extensive as they are now.

(His brother wasn't even close enough to Jubilife to go to the medic there. No, he was left to wrap and care for his own gruesome injuries in the fucking *mountains*, alone alone alone. It's a miracle he didn't die of infection.)

Elesa takes a deep breath, but when she speaks again her words are still laced with fury, eyes burning like she's defending Emmet from nosy reporters. "So let me get this straight. This Kamado asshole—"

"Language!" Ingo chides.

Elesa ignores him. "This Kamado asshole decided that the best way to calm a powerful, frenzied Pokemon was to throw a *lost teenager* at it."

Akari nods, looking down at her clenched hands. Johanna hugs her daughter close.

"That is fucked up," Emmet says.

Ingo looks at him, horrified, and shouts, "*Language*, Emmet!"

Akari, meanwhile, bursts into something between laughter and tears. "N-No, no, he's right. It definitely is."

Ingo sighs, rubbing at his temples. “I still do not know why you trusted that man so much before your exile.”

At the word *exile,* Johanna looks up with an icy expression that could rival Emmet’s most feral of grins, asking “Pardon?” at the same time Elesa says, *“Exile?”*

Akari cringes, ignoring them for the moment to instead focus on Ingo. “I-I…I thought if I could just prove myself to him he would…dial it back or something. Have Zisu or someone help me. It sounds dumb, but…”

All of the adults in the room, save Emmet, protest. Emmet just shrugs. It *was* dumb, but he won’t fault her for a bad decision. He has made plenty of those.

“Just—let me finish,” Akari huffs, looking almost grateful for Emmet’s agreement. “You wouldn’t know this, Uncle, but a lot of the people in Sinnoh are direct descendants of the people from Hisui. And I mean *direct.* They looked *so much* like some people I knew—know—in this time. Kamado included. I think that’s why I kept…trusting him. Hoping that once I earned my keep he would…I dunno. Actually *care* about me getting hurt.”

Ingo nods his understanding, gaze sympathetic. “I see. So you trust the Kamado of this time?”

Akari laughs, but even to Emmet it’s sharp and bitter. “With my life. His name is Professor Rowan, and he's the professor of this region. I was his assistant.”

Johanna apparently hasn’t heard this part yet, because she puts a hand over her mouth, visibly paling. “Dawn…”

“I worked with him for five years, before Hisui,” Akari chokes, wiping at her eyes. “H-He’s always been stern, but he’s so *nice.* He would never let me do something that would put me in danger. He’s like my grandpa. He would never do what Kamado did, b-but they looked so *alike.*“

And Akari finally starts crying in earnest. Emmet feels his heart clench as Johanna bundles her daughter closer.

Ingo looks like he wants to help comfort the girl, but settles for squeezing Emmet’s hand harder instead, almost to a painful degree. Emmet ignores it and sweeps his thumb over his brother’s knuckles,

hoping the gesture is as soothing as it was for Emmet.

It takes a bit for Akari to recover, and even longer for her to struggle through the rest of her story. However, there are moments when the sparkle returns to her eye, when she goes off on tangents and speaks happily of meals with Rei and Professor Laventon or helping the villagers become more comfortable with Pokemon. Spending time with her own Pokemon and seeing how beautiful the land itself was, untouched by human hands.

“I think I found where our house would be built!” Akari says to her mom. “Or at least Twinleaf. Lake Verity was already there so I tried retracing my steps.”

Johanna smiles at her daughter’s enthusiasm, but there’s something haunted in her expression. Emmet does not blame her. He too feels haunted by what he has heard and by what could have been.

However, Akari’s face lights up when she talks about being sent to calm Lord Electrode. “That's when I met Uncle Ingo! He lead me up the mountain to where the noble lived.”

Ingo recalls the memory with a fond smile. “Yes. Irida introduced the two of us, and it did not take long for Akari to cleverly deduce we may have come from the same station.”

Akari laughs. “You act like I was some great detective.” She lifts a hand to count off on her fingers. “You had amnesia, you talked about trains, you had a broken Xtransceiver, and you were the best battler I’d met in all of Hisui, not afraid of Pokemon at all. It wasn’t too hard to connect the dots that you were from the future, too.”

“Still, I am grateful that you cared enough to do so,” Ingo replies.

Akari seems personally offended by the idea she might *not* care, immediately launching into a lengthy list of everything Ingo has done to help her.

“—and when I was really sick that second winter you stayed in Jubilife for a whole *week* to take care of me, and you helped me find a sudowoodo for the pokedex, and you helped me make our friendship bracelets just because I *really* really wanted to even though I know you were super busy, and any time I was feeling really homesick I would come visit you and you *always* made me feel better—"

Ingo is red as a tamato berry, covering his face with his hands and

begging Akari to stop. Johanna is stifling a laugh and Elesa is grinning like a gengar. Emmet beams at his brother's misfortune, leaning in to bump his shoulder and further the teasing. His heart feels unbearably full.

Even without his memories, Ingo was still Ingo, and his kind, protective nature remained even when Hisui tried to stamp it out. Akari needed Ingo there with her in Hisui. While that doesn't make the time away from Emmet *worth* it in his mind, it does help. To know that something good came of all this.

Emmet decides he was being silly earlier, to be jealous of Ingo so obviously adoring this girl. Emmet is happy that amidst the pain and isolation of Hisui, his brother found *some*one to talk to and get a hug from every once in a while. Someone who understood on some level what he was struggling with.

"Thank you for bringing my brother home," Emmet interrupts, finally taking mercy on Ingo. He even tries his best to inject some of the gratitude he feels into his voice.

Akari looks surprised, thrown off her attack, and then it's her turn to blush and wave him off. "I-It was nothing! Seriously, he helped me way more than the other way around." She shrugs. "The least I could do was bring him home."

Ingo looks close to tears at the declaration, but Emmet doesn't call him out on it.

The rest of Akari's story somehow manages to get *worse*, as the girl is first exiled by Kamado (and Ingo's face darkens with an unfamiliar rage, like a wild pangoro aiming for the kill), then forced to subdue two literal *gods*, and then betrayed and almost *murdered* by the merchant she thought a friend.

"And after that, it took me another six months to finish up the pokedex so Arceus would send us home," Akari ends with an anticlimactic shrug, picking at the cuff of her sweatpants.

There is a brief moment of silence as they all try to digest that.

Finally, Elesa says to Johanna, "You're taking her to therapy, right?"

Johanna nods, expression firm.

Akari looks startled. "What? It wasn't *that* bad—"

“It was *verrrrry* bad,” Emmet says.

“Akari," Ingo sighs. "All I know is the world of Hisui and I can confirm it was indeed that bad."

“You are going, too,” Emmet adds to his brother, happily. “You can meet my therapist first, if you would like.”

Ingo opens his mouth with a frown, as if to protest, before changing tracks. “What is a therapist?”

There’s a beat of silence, before Elesa says, “Someone you, uh…talk to when you need help working through your feelings. Especially after going through something traumatic.”

Ingo turns back to Emmet, aghast. “*You* have a therapist? Did something happen in my absence?”

Emmet barks a sharp laugh. Maybe Ingo cannot read him as well as he thought anymore, because Emmet is *far* from well, and that is entirely due to Ingo’s absence.

“Separation anxiety,” Emmet says as an answer. Ingo frowns, detecting the joke but not sure what to make of it. Elesa sighs.

After the retelling of their stories, both Ingo and Akari look exhausted. Emmet can relate—he has always been a light sleeper, and yet he could probably catch up on three years of missed sleep right here, leaning against his brother in a cold, noisy hospital with the dying sun at their backs, casting the room aglow in orange light.

Akari yawns, still trying to protest the therapist idea, when Ingo stands and tugs Emmet and Elesa along with him to their feet. Elesa looks suitably shocked at Ingo’s new strength.

“You are tired,” Ingo says to Akari’s questioning look, gesturing to the now-vacant bed.

“No, I—I mean, yeah, but I don’t want you to *leave*—"

Ingo looks just as reluctant to part ways with the girl, so Elesa pipes up. “Well, Ingo has to stay here until at least tomorrow morning, so he isn’t *leaving* leaving yet. But we could also trade numbers, so once we head back to Unova we can keep in touch?”

Ingo and Akari both seem mildly soothed by the idea, though Emmet

catches Ingo mouthing “Numbers?” to himself.

But then Akari groans. “Wait. My stupid god phone broke on the way back to the future, and I’m not sure if I can get it working again.” Then her head whips up, renewed fury blazing in her eyes. “Arceus better not have fried it. I have so many good pictures on there!”

Ingo chuckles as Johanna shakes her head and steps forward, offering her own phone. Elesa takes it, pulling out her Xtrans and handing it over in turn.

Elesa then shares Johanna’s number with Emmet, who hesitates before putting it into his contacts list. He just wants to leave Hisui behind when they finally take Ingo home, but he knows that won’t be possible. And Ingo and Akari are close. Ingo will be upset if he cannot check in on the girl. Emmet won’t separate them like he was separated from his brother.

Even after trading numbers, Ingo and Akari seem reluctant to part. The girl keeps giving his brother the saddest lillipup eyes Emmet has ever seen. And he has seen many real lillipup.

“Dawn, let Ingo rest too,” Johanna says, soft but firm. Then her mouth curves into a teasing smile. “You need the sleep anyways. Barry and Lucas are on their way back from Kalos, so I’m sure they’ll both be here bright and early tomorrow morning. How are you going to keep up with Barry if you don’t rest?”

Akari groans but finally flops back into bed, pulling the heavy blanket over herself and wiggling into a comfortable position. It’s the most normal teenager behavior Emmet has witnessed from the girl since meeting her.

“Still can’t believe they decided to launch a search for me in the farthest region possible right when I managed to get home,” she grumbles, sounding torn between fond exasperation and tears. “Stupid caring friends. We could’ve reunited hours ago.”

“I will depart, then,” Ingo says, hand reaching up as if to tip his hat before fumbling awkwardly at the empty space. Instead of making fun of him, Elesa looks like she might cry again at the aborted gesture. “Sleep well, Akari. I will be sure to make a stop here on my way out.”

Before Ingo can step away, Akari reaches out and grabs him, tugging him closer to pull him into another hug. Ingo easily obliges. It’s still strange, to see his brother so comfortable touching someone other

than Emmet and Elesa.

“I will be certain to stop in before we leave,” Ingo assures again as they untangle, kissing the top of her head on his way up. She giggles, finally releasing him.

They give Johanna another wave, Elesa getting Ingo’s room number from Emmet before passing it along. And then it’s just the three of them again, out in the hall. Ingo looks…a little lost, like he isn’t sure what to do now. He clutches the container holding his Pokemon.

“Room 826, right Em?” Elesa asks, glancing between the brothers. At Emmet’s nod, she loops an arm through Ingo’s and grabs Emmet with the other, leading them back to Ingo’s room. As soon as they arrive, Elesa gently pushes Ingo into sitting on the edge of his bed.

“You need to rest,” Elesa says, clearly trying to sound lighthearted even as Emmet catches her looking at the tired bags under Ingo’s eyes. They make him seem older than he really is.

Ingo frowns and straightens, clearly worried and trying to hide it. His gaze flicks between Elesa and Emmet. “You mentioned returning to Unova. Where will you station for the night?”

“Well, Emmet will probably want to stay with you,” Elesa starts. Emmet gives a firm nod.

Ingo seems relieved by that, much of the tension bleeding from his frame. Oh. Did he think Emmet was leaving? Ingo is going to have to get it through his head that Emmet is staying by his side as long as Ingo allows.

“I’ll go back to the hotel for the night and take care of our Pokemon,” Elesa says reluctantly, clearly channeling some of her gym leader persona and taking responsibility for something she really doesn’t want to do. Emmet is grateful. “I need to get them ready to see you tomorrow.”

Ingo straightens up, a note of hesitant excitement in his voice. “Is there perchance a Pokemon with purple flames among them?”

Elesa blinks.

Emmet stares at his brother, heart squeezing in his chest. “Chandelure. You remember her?”

“As much as I remember you, Emmet,” Ingo admits. “Only purple flames and a sense of…safety. Of expecting to see someone at my side.”

Elesa makes a small, heartbroken noise in her throat, and Emmet can’t resist moving to his brother’s side, pressing his arm against Ingo’s.

“That is Chandelure,” Emmet says, happy and sad all at once. “She was your first Pokemon, along with my eelektross.”

“Wait—" Elesa digs through her purse and pulls her phone out, tapping and flicking at her screen for a moment before handing it to Ingo, who holds it awkwardly. Like an old man unused to technology.

“Ah,” Ingo says, breath leaving in a shaky exhale as he sees what is on the screen. It’s an older picture of Chandelure that Emmet took during the first year of Ingo’s disappearance, before she stopped eating and started hiding away in her pokeball instead. In the photo, the ghost type’s purple glow was illuminating their living room on one of the many nights that Emmet couldn’t sleep.

“She seems…sad,” Ingo says.

Emmet’s smile wavers. No one but Ingo (and to an extent, Emmet) could ever read Chandelure’s expressions. Or lack thereof.

“She was verrrrry sad, when you disappeared,” Emmet says quietly. “I had her—all of your Pokemon—help me battle on the singles line, but…they missed you.”

It’s quiet for a few moments as Ingo continues to stare at the screen, occasionally wiping away new tears.

“You should probably brace yourself to be completely dogpiled by your team tomorrow,” Elesa teases. “They all missed you like crazy.”

“I believe I missed them as well,” Ingo murmurs, reluctantly handing the phone back to Elesa.

From there, Elesa quickly double-checks with one of the nurses that Ingo should be able to leave the next day after one more healing session, since he was mostly just being kept for observation. The nurse assures her that aside from old, healed injuries and the line of stitches on his side that need to be kept clean, Ingo has a clean bill of health and can be released.

“I’ll bring you some actual clothes when I come back tomorrow,” Elesa says.

Ingo gives the stiff hospital gown he is wearing a frown. “That would be much appreciated. Thank you, Elesa. Could you, ah, also see about the attire I arrived in?” Ingo looks up at their sister with hopeful eyes. “Some of it holds…sentimental value to me.”

Emmet thinks of the ratty, torn remains of Ingo’s jacket, the dirtied cap that he was wearing in that video even after three years of attacks and rockslides in ancient Sinnoh, and swallows back another round of tears.

“Of course, Ingo,” Elesa says, eyes softening. “I’ll ask. Are you both all right if I let everyone else know that you’re back? I know Emmet has had his phone off the whole day.”

Ingo blinks, looking taken aback. “Everyone?”

Elesa nods. “Not the general public, of course. But our other friends and the league.“

Ingo looks helplessly to Emmet, so Emmet shrugs and says, “I am not answering my phone. As long as they do not distress Ingo and leave us alone I do not care.”

Elesa rolls her eyes. “Yeah yeah, I’ll play PR person. They were worried about him too, Em.”

Not as worried as Emmet or Elesa or their Pokemon. But Emmet can’t fault them for wanting Ingo to be safe. They *did* help look for him, especially during the first year he was missing.

“I’ll be back tomorrow bright and early,” Elesa promises, already typing on her phone. “So please try to get some sleep. Arceus knows you both need it.”

Emmet makes a noncommittal noise, exhausted but not sure he wants to risk going to sleep and losing Ingo again. Ingo simply nods, giving Emmet a suspicious look like he knows that his twin doesn’t plan to listen.

Before she leaves, Elesa pulls the two of them into a crushing hug and promises to take good care of their teams to prepare them for Ingo’s arrival tomorrow. Then she gives Ingo a kiss on the cheek for good measure, laughing at his sputtered, embarrassed response before

leaving with a lighthearted wiggle of her fingers over her shoulder.

“Is she always like that?” Ingo mutters, glowering at the door. The effect is ruined by how he rubs his hand over his cheek, still flushed with embarrassment.

“Yup! She loves to tease us.”

Ingo hums, then immediately fights a yawn. It’s only early evening, maybe 7:00pm, but Emmet doesn’t blame him for being so tired. Emmet feels his own exhaustion weigh heavy on his shoulders, like eelektross is asleep around his neck.

“You need to rest!” Emmet says with a decisive nod, standing to poke and prod Ingo’s limbs back into the bed until he’s lying down again. Emmet pulls the thin sheet up and over Ingo’s lower half, wondering if he should go looking for something heavier. Is Ingo cold?

“Where will you stay for the night?” Ingo asks, interrupting his thoughts.

Emmet hesitates, glancing at the couch in the corner of the room. It’s small, made for visitors and not grown men to spend the night on, but it will do. He can still see Ingo from it when he wakes up. If he manages to fall asleep in the first place.

Ingo’s frown deepens as he follows Emmet’s gaze to the couch. Then he looks away, his face flushing.

“What is it?” Emmet asks.

For a moment, Emmet thinks Ingo might not answer, but then he turns redder and peeks up at Emmet, like a child afraid to be made fun of. “You can—that is. Would it be strange to say you can sleep here, as well? N-Not that you have to, I’m sure it wouldn’t be all that comfortable with the both of us—"

“You do not mind?” Emmet asks, trying not to get his hopes up. “If we share?”

Ingo blinks, looking pleasantly surprised. “No! Not at all. I just…did not know if the suggestion would be unwelcome. If it would be strange to suggest.”

Emmet is already laughing and shaking his head before Ingo finishes talking. “It was not uncommon for us to have sleepovers, even as

adults. It is…calming, to be so close. I understand."

Ingo looks visibly relieved by that. He opens his mouth to speak, but Emmet lifts a finger and cuts him off.

"But! First I will find us food. You are too skinny."

Ingo's worried look flattens. "I assure you I am fine, Emmet."

"Nope! Remain parked at the station while I find us some fuel. Have you eaten today?"

Finally, Ingo backs down. "…No."

"Then it is settled!" Emmet turns on his heel and marches out of the room before his brother can protest or he can linger too long. He doesn't want to leave Ingo, but he definitely wants him to eat!

Luckily, acquiring something that looks half-decent from the cafeteria isn't too difficult. On the way out he stops by the vending machine to grab a small, sweet cake snack that Ingo was always fond of as well, excited to find such a treasure. His brother went three years without processed baked goods! Such a tragedy must be fixed as soon as possible.

Emmet returns to Ingo's room, walking a bit faster than is strictly necessary. His heart is beating just a little fast. He can't help worrying that he'll get back to the room only to find Ingo gone again, taken away or having climbed out the window or—

Or, as he finds when he finally slips into the room, half-asleep sitting up. He relaxes as Ingo's head dips towards his chest, then bops back up, his eyes blinking slow and heavy. The sight is soothing, in a strange way.

Emmet steps inside and Ingo jerks to attention, whipping around to look at Emmet like he is about to be attacked. Less soothing. Emmet's chest aches.

But then Ingo gives him a big Ingo smile, mostly in the eyes. He's clearly delighted not by the sight of food that Emmet carries but by Emmet himself, and Emmet might cry again.

To try and avoid that, he plops himself on the edge of the bed and hands a styrofoam bowl of soup and a shrink-wrapped sandwich over to Ingo, keeping the cake snack hidden away in his coat pocket for

now.

The following meal is quiet, but the good kind of quiet. Ingo seems uncertain about the food at first, but quickly takes to the spicy chili and eagerly eats it all. Emmet smiles as he sips at his own soup.

When they're done, Emmet sets their dishes aside and pulls out the snack cake with a flourish and a grin. "Ta-dah!"

Ingo stares blankly at the snack, then tilts his head with a frown. "Cakes?"

Oh. Of course he wouldn't remember how much he loved—*loves* these. Emmet shoves away his disappointment and focuses on his excitement instead. He gets to reintroduce Ingo to one of his favorite snacks! He hurries to open the loud plastic packaging and hand one of the cakes over to Ingo.

His brother takes it cautiously, frowning at the bright pink icing topping the even brighter sponge cake. "It's so…colorful."

"It is one of your favorites!" Emmet blurts, practically shaking with excitement. "Persim berry flavor."

Ingo gives Emmet a doubtful look, but doesn't question any further before taking a small bite. To Emmet's delight, Ingo's eyes widen with pleasant surprise.

"It is very sweet!" Ingo says, taking another bite and humming happily.

Emmet laughs and decides he does not need the other cake in the package. Not when Ingo looks so happy, finishing off the first cake and glancing at the second with barely-disguised longing.

Emmet should probably make Ingo stop at one since he has been living on a completely different diet for over three years, but Ingo was always the more cautious twin and Emmet is a sucker for making his brother happy, so he hands over the second one.

"Are you sure?" Ingo asks with a frown. "You did not have one."

Emmet shakes his head, adamant. "I don't need one! I am happy that you are happy."

Ingo's frown doesn't leave, but after a moment he takes the cake,

breaking it cleanly in two and handing one half back to Emmet.

“A compromise,” Ingo says, sounding pleased with himself.

Emmet relents with a laugh, taking the offering. “A compromise.”

Soon after eating, their fatigue returns in full force. Emmet draws the curtains to block the city’s sea of lights as night falls, then climbs into the small hospital bed, gently nudging his brother over to make room. Ingo does so, and lifts the blanket for Emmet like second nature. Emmet kicks off his shoes and tosses his hat on the nearby table.

It’s a snug fit—hospital beds are not meant to hold two grown adults, but if they rest on their sides, eye-to-eye, it works. The closeness and warmth is more than worth any discomfort Emmet’s joints will experience overnight.

Emmet doesn’t want to push his luck, but he puts his hand in the small space between them, fingers lying open in invitation. Like trying to coax a wild Pokemon closer. Ingo immediately reaches back and twines their fingers together. Emmet smiles and kicks his leg forward to rest against Ingo’s for good measure.

Something in Emmet’s soul seems to settle. Ingo gives Emmet a soft look in the falling darkness

“I missed you,” Emmet says again, quiet.

“I missed you too,” Ingo says back, voice earnest. But then his eyes flick down to their intertwined hands, and something troubled flickers across his face.

Oh. Is this too much? Emmet does not want to push his brother, as much as the thought digs into his heart like a railway spike. Hesitantly, he moves to tug his hand away. Ingo’s eyes snap back to his, questioning.

“You do not have to touch me, when I ask,” Emmet says haltingly. He's reluctant to part, but it is of the utmost importance that his brother feels comfortable.

Ingo, however, just blinks at Emmet. “What do you mean?”

Emmet swallows and lets his eyes slide away from Ingo’s, back down to their hands. “When I reach for you, you reach back. But you do not remember me.” He takes a bracing breath. “If I am bothering you, you

must tell me. I will stop."

Ingo frowns. "Emmet, I…admittedly do not have a clear picture of our past together. But that does not mean you are a stranger to me."

But how can Emmet be anything but? To Emmet, Ingo is still Ingo, even if he is quiet and scarred and different. But to Ingo, he is just… the man in white with his face. There is no Emmet left in Ingo's head for him to recognize.

Oh, he's crying again. Whoops.

Ingo's face pinches, clearly upset. He reaches up to brush away Emmet's tears. "This morning, when you hugged me, I was still convinced you were a zoroark about to rip my throat out. Do you know why I hugged you anyways?"

Emmet shakes his head.

"Because I couldn't *stand* to see you so upset. It was the worst feeling in the world. Everything in me was screaming to comfort you."

"Oh," Emmet says, voice cracking.

"I do not have my memories at the moment, but it appears my heart still knows you very well," Ingo continues, squeezing Emmet's hand.

"That is verrrrry cheesy," Emmet whines, burrowing forward to hide in his brother's chest. Ingo wraps an arm around him, and Emmet shudders a relieved breath.

"When I was in Hisui, I cannot tell you how many times I looked to my side to share my thoughts, expecting to see someone who was supposed to be there. Battling alone felt particularly wrong. Lonely."

Emmet nods.

"So I promise you are not bothering me." Ingo says. Then he chuckles, sounding embarrassed. "I would have been initiating touch more if I had known it was all right with you. I just…do not recall our interactions in the past, so I did not want to cling."

Emmet laughs through his tears. He thinks there is no amount of cling that would turn him away. What a silly pair of brothers they make.

"I missed you," Emmet says, again, like a secret shared in the blanket forts they made when they were small. A mantra in the past tense, a

signifier that it's finally over, that they no longer have to miss one another.

Ingo doesn't even hesitate. "I missed you too. I'm sorry that I cannot remember much. I am sure that I am not the same brother you waited so long for, but—"

"Don't," Emmet says, fingers tightening around Ingo's. "I waited for *you*. You are…different. And it makes me sad that you do not remember. And that you went through so much. But you are still Ingo."

Now it's Ingo's turn to blink back tears, looking grateful. "Could you tell me about us? Before?"

Emmet tried hard over the past three years to not think too much about the happy memories of the past, before Ingo's disappearance. It hurt too much.

But now he perks up, grinning. "Of course!"

He is absolutely going to share every single one of Ingo's most embarrassing moments.

But first, to ease them into it, he starts somewhere gentler. He starts at their first train ride, when they were five years old and each holding one of their mother's hands, rocking with the motion of the train and looking eagerly out the window as the world blurred by.

Emmet never used to talk much, when Ingo could handle most conversations instead. After he disappeared, Emmet had to get better at it, but he still prefers to keep his speaking to a minimum when possible.

But this, retelling story after story to his brother, watching Ingo's lips twitch with smiles and quiet laughter, makes it worth it. By time the moon has risen high in the sky, Emmet's throat is sore and raspy. Still, he doesn't stop until Ingo drifts off first, face softening to something more peaceful as his eyes slip closed. He still snores, though it's quieter. Like the rumble of an engine.

Emmet smiles at his brother, feeling more at peace than he has in years. Sleep drags heavy at his eyelids, making him blink slow. His free hand fiddles with Ingo's bracelets, unyielding wood and soft, woven string. Ah, that must be the friendship bracelet Akari mentioned. Emmet would bet money she has a matching one. What a

softie his brother is.

Emmet is so sleepy and so, *so* happy.

“I love you, Ingo,” Emmet whispers, finally brave enough to say it when his brother is too far gone to respond. They were never particularly vocal about saying it before, choosing to show it through actions instead. But that was one of Emmet’s biggest regrets after Ingo disappeared. That his actions may not have been enough. That Ingo vanished without ever knowing.

Maybe in the morning Emmet will be brave enough to say it when his brother can actually respond.

Chapter End Notes

> Hey everyone! ^^ Just a quick note that the next chapter might take a bit longer to come out than the weekly update schedule I've kept to so far. I have a lot going on irl right now, so just wanted to give a heads-up that it might take a few weeks to update. I felt like this was a good stopping point for that!
>
> Thanks to everyone who has read this far, and especially to those who have left kudos and comments! :') They're super appreciated.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Reuniting with old friends, both human and Pokemon.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! :D No idea if anyone is still keeping track of this story, but we have an end goal in sight! The next chapter is already written, and the last one is about halfway there, so those should hopefully come out on a weekly basis from here on out. Hope you enjoy!

When Emmet wakes, he feels more well-rested than he has in literal years, despite the stiff hospital mattress beneath him and the bed rail pressing into his back. Soft breaths brush against his face, and he squints an eye open in the early morning light. His lungs catch at the sight of Ingo, fast asleep with his cheek mushed into the thin pillow.

It wasn't a dream. Ingo is really, truly back.

Oh, more crying! Yay. Emmet doesn't bother fighting the tears that drip sideways down his cheeks, but he does try to keep himself quiet so he doesn't wake Ingo. After Hisui, his brother needs all the rest he can get.

Unfortunately, Ingo's face scrunches as he too wakes, eyes fluttering open. Stupid twin wavelength. His neutral expression dips into a frown as soon as he sees Emmet, already crying like a baby at 7:00 in the morning.

"Emmet," Ingo murmurs, reaching up with warm, gloveless hands to wipe away the tears, only for them to be replaced by more. "Are you all right?"

Emmet laughs wetly. "These are happy tears. Verrrrry happy. You are still here."

Ingo's forehead creases, but he nods. "I am here, Emmet. I will not be uncoupling from you again any time soon."

Emmet's next words are more bitter than he would like them to be, spilling out before he can stop them. "You don't know that."

Ingo sighs, then moves a gentle hand to the back of Emmet's neck, pulling him closer so Ingo can press their foreheads together. "No, I suppose I don't. But if it is to happen again, I will stop at nothing to return to you."

That will have to do. Emmet ducks closer to bury his face in Ingo's neck, holding him close in a tangle of limbs. Ingo hugs him back, just as tight.

They only separate when a nurse knocks on the door to do one last healing pulse session on Ingo's side. As her audino works, tiny paws resting on Ingo's injury through his hospital gown and glowing a gentle pink, the nurse explains that after this Ingo just needs to take it easy on his side and keep the wound clean, and the stitches will dissolve on their own. Ingo looks awestruck by this revelation, and Emmet is reminded that his brother is only familiar with the technological advancements of two centuries ago.

Emmet cannot *wait* to introduce him to trains again.

After the healing session, a second nurse knocks on the door, asking if Ingo wants to allow a woman named Elesa to visit. Ingo nods, perking up.

By time Elesa arrives to the room, Ingo and Emmet have used the complimentary toothbrushes and toothpaste to brush their teeth, doing their best to tame their short hair without a shower. Instead, they wash their faces with cold water, and at least it isn't obvious anymore that Emmet has been crying on and off for the past 24 hours.

Elesa knocks on the doorframe before entering the room, lighting up at the sight of the two of them. She looks at Ingo like Emmet feels, like she's still full of joy and disbelief that he's in the same room as them again. Of course, she's quicker to hide it. She pulls a stylish satchel that matches her outfit around to her front, digging through it.

"All right Ingo, time to get you into some actual clothes. Hospital blue is not your color."

Ingo leans forward to try and catch a glimpse of the items inside the bag, like a little kid. Emmet's smile widens.

Elesa pulls out a small stack of neatly folded clothes—an unfamiliar navy sweater and a pair of jeans. Elesa must have gone out last night and bought Ingo a new outfit. She is a very good sister.

Ingo slumps, obviously disappointed and doing a terrible job of hiding it. “Ah. Thank you, Elesa.”

Ingo reaches for the clothes. Elesa looks at him for a solid two seconds, conflicted, before she groans, completely defenseless against anything that would make Ingo happy. She throws the new outfit back in the bag and digs through it again to whip out a different stack of clothes, these fabrics torn and faded.

“Fine, fine. Here. I brought what was left of your clothes from Hisui, too.”

Ingo smiles in earnest. He thanks Elesa again and takes them, returning to the bathroom to get dressed. Elesa grumbles about Ingo preferring his old, torn-up garb instead of the new (and likely expensive) clothes. Emmet smiles at her, but clenches and unclenches his hands, feeling anxious for some reason.

He understands why a minute later, when Ingo emerges, looking both more relaxed and more nervous, peering at them as if awaiting their reactions. Emmet can’t help staring, throat tight with emotion. Ingo is in the same outfit from the video, just freshly laundered. A pair of nondescript slacks and a pale pink sweater with a strange logo on the front (and a rip in the fabric from that stealth rock—how did they get the blood out?). The tattered remains of his black coat hang around his shoulders, and his ragged hat sits snug atop his head.

He doesn’t look like the old Ingo from before, who would have never let his coat and hat get so run-down, and who certainly would have never worn something as casual as a hoodie under his work uniform. But there is enough of a resemblance to feel nostalgic. It’s a strange feeling, leaving Emmet somewhere between relief and discomfort. He doesn’t like the stark reminder of Hisui’s harshness, but he does like how his brother is clearly more comfortable, his coat a (somewhat) matching set to Emmet’s once again.

Once she sees him, Elesa can’t even be upset about Ingo’s preference for his old clothes. Her lip wobbles for a moment before she gives their brother a shaky smile and a thumbs-up. “Looking good, Ingo. A little rugged, but it works for you.”

Ingo flushes, and tips his hat to her in thanks.

Before heading to Akari's room, they pack up the few belongings scattered around on tables and chairs, and Ingo carefully pockets the ancient pokeballs holding his Hisuian team.

They're making their way through busy hospital corridors and on the other end of the hallway from Akari's room when they hear raised voices. Ingo pales, then darts ahead, while Emmet and Elesa hurry to follow. Ingo practically crashes into the doorframe with a pokeball in hand, but he pauses at whatever he sees inside. Emmet peers over his shoulder, and suddenly understands why his brother had stopped cold.

Akari is on the ground, sitting on top of a blonde boy around her age. She has his arm yanked behind his back, his flailing limbs carefully pinned, and a feral grin on her face.

“Admit it, Barry!” She says.

Behind her, Johanna has a hand over her face while a dark-haired boy looks on in fond amusement.

“Fine!” The blonde boy yelps, slapping his hand on the tile floor. “I give! You win! You win!”

Akari laughs and releases the boy, rolling off him to pop back to her feet. The blonde, Barry, groans and takes a minute to recuperate.

“And what did we learn?” Akari chirps.

“That Dawn is now the badass of the group,” Barry grumbles.

She winks and offers him a hand up. “And don’t you forget it!”

Once everyone is standing again, Akari glances over and spots the three of them staring in the doorway. Her face lights up.

“Uncle!” She cries, leaping at Ingo in a hug. Just as he did the day before, Ingo easily catches her.

Elesa, eyes wide as dinner plates, sends Emmet a disbelieving look, mouthing, *What the fuck? When did he get so strong?*

Emmet bites back a laugh, shrugging and mouthing back, *Hisui.*

Ingo also looks stunned, and blinks down at the girl. “Akari, what..?” His gaze flicks behind her, to the two boys. The dark-haired boy waves sheepishly, and the blonde squints suspiciously at the newcomers.

“Hm?” Akari hops back to her feet, then seemingly realizes the situation. She beams. “Oh! Uncle, these are my best friends, Lucas and Barry!”

Ingo nods slowly, but he blinks hard at Lucas, as if trying to clear his sight.

Akari winces and leans forward to whisper, “He looks a lot like Rei, I know. Why do you think he and I were besties so quickly?”

Then she tugs Ingo into the room, presenting him with a flourish. “Guys, this is Uncle Ingo!”

Barry moves into Ingo’s space, staring up at him with a challenging frown. Emmet bristles, preparing to step between the two.

(Nevermind the fact that Akari beat this boy in a fight, which means Ingo *absolutely* could—it’s the principle of the matter.)

Ingo, however, stops Emmet, taking the hostility in stride with a polite nod. “Pleasure to meet you.”

If anything, the greeting only makes Barry’s eyes narrow more. After a moment, though, he nods and steps back, swinging an arm around to point right in Ingo’s face. “I am fining you one million yen, Uncle Ingo!”

Ingo, clearly bewildered, blinks.

“Barry,” Akari groans.

“As the grown-up, you should’ve kept Dawn from getting hurt in Hisui!” Barry huffs, crossing his arms. “Now she can beat me in a fight and I’m going to have to train ten times harder!”

Ingo’s guilty expression dissolves as confusion overtakes him. Emmet relates, watching the blonde boy’s exuberant gestures with a flat smile. He has no idea whether this Barry is actually blaming Ingo or not. If he is, there will be hell to pay.

But Akari steps forward, snagging Barry in a headlock and cutting him off with a strained sound. She looks annoyed.

Emmet gives her ten more points.

“Sorry, Uncle Ingo, Barry can be…a lot,” Akari sighs, giving the boy a noogie as he struggles. “He’s a little protective.”

Ingo nods, looking unsure of how to respond to that.

Luckily, Lucas steps forward to introduce himself like a normal human

being, even following their Unovan customs and offering his hand for a handshake, which Ingo accepts. Emmet idly notes that, where Akari and Barry's Unovan speech has a slight Sinnohan accent, Lucas' words do not. Maybe he is not a Sinnoh native?

Lucas' eyes flick to Emmet and Elesa, widening a fraction. "Oh, wow. You're the Subway Masters and gym leader of Nimbasa City, right?"

Emmet nods, giving the boy a polite smile and a wave. "I am Emmet."

"That's us," Elesa agrees, moving forward to hook an arm around each twin's shoulders with a winning smile that makes Lucas blush. "I'm surprised you recognize us!"

"W-Well, I did the gym track here in Sinnoh a few years ago and we'd been thinking of doing the Unova one next before—" Lucas' sheepish smile falters.

Suddenly, Akari and Barry stop their playful squabbling.

"Oh yeah," Akari says, soft and thoughtful. "We *were* talking about traveling around Unova, weren't we? I wasn't even a serious trainer back then." Then she seems to realize what she's saying and gives both boys a perplexed look. "Wait, you didn't do that yet?"

Barry, for the first time since they've met the boy, looks serious. He bumps Akari's shoulder with his own. "'Course not. Couldn't do it without you."

Akari flushes, blinking hard as Lucas backs this up with a nod. "We spent most of our time looking for you. A gym circuit wasn't important enough to keep us from that."

Akari looks like she's about to cry. "B-But…I was gone for over two years! I didn't even go on the journey with you the first time, I was just a research assistant!"

"Uh, *and* our best friend!" Barry scoffs, indignant. Then he grins, nudging Akari as she wipes at her eyes. "Plus, you said you battled in Hisui! I gotta see how you do in a fight."

Akari laughs wetly. "I'm not *that* good."

Emmet sees the moment Ingo straightens up, indignant on his adopted niece's behalf. "I can assure you that Akari is an excellent battler! Easily among the best in Hisui."

Lucas' jaw drops. "Dawn, did you just get called an 'excellent battler' by one of the Subway Masters?"

Akari, blushing but clearly pleased, sticks her tongue out at Ingo. "No, I got complimented by my silly uncle who tends to put me on a pedestal."

Elesa snorts. "Normally I'd agree, but Ingo doesn't exaggerate when it comes to battling. This knucklehead is serious."

Barry grins at that, giving Dawn a playful punch to the arm that makes her punch him in return.

As the three teenagers talk, Elesa turns a fond look on the twins at her side.

"They remind me of us, when we were their age," she whispers.

Emmet snorts. "Even I couldn't match up to Barry."

Elesa laughs. "True. He's got Ingo's volume, though."

Emmet glances at Ingo to see his response, only for his smile to falter.

Ingo looks…uncomfortable, almost. Staring down at his shoes with his lips pressed flat. Emmet nudges his brother, concerned, only for Ingo to close his eyes and take a deep breath.

"We…went on a Pokemon journey together?" Ingo asks, voice small. "All three of us?"

Oh. Of course Ingo wouldn't remember that. Wouldn't remember the triumph of winning their first badges, or of training countless hours with their litwick and tynamo. Or meeting Elesa and fighting off a horde of angry ferroseed to save a little emolga. He has no memories of their late night campfires and countless adventures.

It's a painful reminder that all of those memories are now just… *gone,* for Ingo. Emmet's stomach twists.

Elesa looks crestfallen as she realizes the same. "...Yeah. We did. It's actually how I met you two."

Ingo blinks, eyes suspiciously bright. Before Emmet can speak again, Akari says something to Ingo. And Ingo, always one to put others first, looks up and offers Akari a strained Ingo smile, all attention on her as he rejoins the teens' conversation.

Behind their brother's back, Emmet and Elesa exchange a worried glance.

They end up staying in Akari's room for another hour before heading out. Akari, Johanna and the boys plan to stay at the same hotel as Elesa and the twins, at least for the night, so it isn't a final goodbye. It still takes a solid ten minutes before they can pry Akari from Ingo. The girl is like an octillery—as soon as they free a single limb she's latching on with another.

So with a reluctant parting and a promise to find each other again this evening, Emmet, Ingo and Elesa finally head to the first floor front desk. The process of getting Ingo checked out of the hospital is long and tedious, and Emmet is once again relieved to have Elesa there to handle the bulk of it. Granted, Emmet is the one signing the actual papers, since he's the emergency contact and blood relative listed first on Ingo's newly acquired medical forms, but still.

The nurse instructs them to keep Ingo on a relatively light, unprocessed diet for the first week, and introduce richer foods slowly. Emmet remembers the sugary pink pecha snack cakes he gave to Ingo the night before and sweats, but manages to send the nurse a strained smile and a nod. He studiously ignores Elesa's suspicious glance and Ingo's cough that sounds just a little too much like a laugh.

But finally, by late morning, Ingo is free.

They step outside to a bright and sunny day, a brisk breeze winding through Emmet's coat to cool him down. The hospital is set back from the street and the city of Eterna proper, but even then the parking lot and garden areas are bustling with people and Pokemon, some patients and some visitors. The babble of voices washes over them, and Ingo tips his head back to breathe in the fresh air with a content expression.

Then a nearby car honks its horn, and Ingo startles, hand flying to his belt where his Hisuian Pokemon sit.

Ah. Right.

"It's okay!" Emmet says, reaching out to loop his arm through Ingo's,

pulling him out of his tense, battle-ready state. “The city is loud, but it won’t harm us as long as we follow safety protocol.”

Ingo stares at a nearby vehicle with cautious eyes, but nods. Elesa leads the two of them over to a car she’d rented, and Emmet crawls in the back first, beckoning Ingo to join him. Hesitantly, Ingo does so. Emmet instructs him how to buckle himself in, and Ingo follows the directions with only a little uncertainty. When the car actually rumbles to life, Ingo nervously grips at the seat with one hand and his pokeballs with the other.

However, once they start moving, his gaze moves to the window and amazement takes over. He leans closer to peer outside with childlike wonder as the car picks up speed and the world blurs by in a smear of colors. Immediately, Ingo wants to know how it all functions, asking Emmet questions about the mechanisms at work even as his eyes stay trained on the window. Emmet answers him the best he can, and when he doesn’t have an answer, he looks it up on his phone.

(Ingo is positively blown away when Emmet and Elesa offer a follow-up explanation of what the Internet is.)

It’s promising, Emmet thinks, that Ingo is more excited by the prospect of new technology and locomotion than he is wary. Emmet is not sure what he would do if Ingo suddenly hated trains. He shudders at the very thought.

Elesa drives them to the closest hotel, where she’d stayed the night before with their Pokemon. It’s a tall building, a little nicer than Emmet would typically drop the money for, but Elesa always insisted on paying for a ritzier place when investigating an Ingo sighting, as if that could help cheer them up when it inevitably fell through.

This time, Emmet is relieved they can go to it in celebration.

They don’t have to check in since Elesa already has their keys and room all set up. She leads them inside (Ingo still jumps uneasily as they pass through the automatic doors) and to the elevator, but stops short there.

“Actually,” she drawls, turning to look at them with an excited glint in her eye. “Why don’t you two wait for me out back?”

Emmet follows her gesture to a door leading behind the hotel, though he can’t see what lies beyond it. Ingo frowns, looking as puzzled as Emmet feels.

“Just trust me on this,” Elesa says with a wink. She turns on her heel and calls the elevator, insisting that the two of them go wait outside as the doors slide closed.

Ingo looks to Emmet, and Emmet shrugs, still smiling. “I have no idea what she is up to. Want to see what’s outside?”

Ingo huffs a laugh at the admission, but follows Emmet out back, where the tall building casts shade over an open, grassy area. It’s fenced in and bordered with landscaping, with a small unused playground off to one side, and on the other…

Ah. Now Emmet knows what Elesa is doing.

Ingo follows Emmet’s gaze, interest piquing as he too spots the large rectangle of dirt, marked with neat white lines. “Is that…a battling arena?”

“Yup!” Emmet says, grinning. “I believe Elesa has taken the initiative on reintroductions.”

Ingo shifts nervously on his feet, glancing back at the hotel. After a moment of consideration, Emmet takes Ingo’s hand and gives it an encouraging squeeze. His brother sends him a grateful look.

“They will be verrrrry happy to see you,” Emmet assures.

Ingo's breath is shaky as he exhales. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Emmet frowns, but before he can question what exactly Ingo means by that, Elesa finally exits the hotel, a small gym bag slung over her shoulder and an excited grin on her face.

“All right, Ingo, ready to be smothered by an army of loving Pokemon?”

Ingo hesitates. “…Yes?”

Elesa laughs, and digs into the bag, pulling out one pokeball in particular. A bittersweet pang hits Emmet in the chest.

Chandelure.

Elesa hands her over to Ingo, giving him a gentle smile. “She needs to see you first.”

Ingo must be able to guess who is in the pokeball, because his eyes

grow misty as he nods. He steps back to give them room, takes a deep breath, then releases the Pokemon inside.

Chandelure appears in a flash of light, barely floating above the grass. Her once-vibrant flames are a pale, sickly lavender, and her yellow eyes flutter open with a heartbreaking dullness. She's facing away from Ingo, towards Emmet, and tilts to look at him tiredly.

Emmet swallows the usual despair that rises in his chest at the sight, and gestures for her to turn around with a hopeful smile.

As much as Chandelure made it clear that she preferred to stay in her ball after the first year of Ingo's disappearance, she still doesn't refuse her second trainer. She lazily spins to follow the order, and Emmet knows when she sees Ingo by how she freezes in place. Even her flames lower, as if she is holding her breath. Then she bobs higher, spinning to look at Emmet with teary eyes and then back again.

Ingo smiles at the sight, tipping his hat to her. "Hello, old friend."

For a moment, there is silence.

And then, Chandelure's pale flames *ignite*, bright as a star. She whistles a shrill sound that is equally grief-stricken as it is overjoyed. Before Emmet can stop her, she rockets into Ingo like a comet. Ingo catches her with a loud laugh, stumbling back with the force of her greeting as he hugs her.

Emmet is definitely crying now.

He hasn't seen Chandelure be anything but listless and miserable for *years*, so to see her now, bobbing up and down with uncontrollable joy, whistling and chiming as she tries to shove herself deeper into Ingo's hold, is emotional to say the least.

Ingo's face is soft as he presses his forehead to Chandelure's, dripping tears onto her glass. "I missed you, too."

Chandelure's flames flicker, and she whistles a quiet, heartbreakingly happy response, finally shuddering into a calmer state.

Emmet wipes at his tears and glances at Elesa, not surprised to see the woman openly crying, a wobbly smile on her face as her makeup is once again ruined. He's not sure why she even bothers with it at this point.

When Ingo finally pulls away, Chandelure stubbornly presses into his side, refusing to let him part even a step. Ingo chuckles and relents, petting her again. Slowly, though, his smile fades.

“What’s wrong?” Elesa asks.

“Her flames are not as…vibrant as I recall.”

Emmet winces, guilt washing over him. He taps a nervous hand against his thigh. “That is my fault. I could not get her to eat as often as she should have.”

There’s a brief pause wherein Emmet fears Ingo will be angry—or worse, *disappointed*—but then, to his surprise, Ingo huffs another quiet laugh. His brother’s face is sad, but he’s looking down at Chandelure (still burrowed into his coat) with undeniable fondness.

“I am getting the sense she is rather…stubborn, when she wants to be. I am sure you did the best you could, Emmet.”

Oh. Emmet isn’t sure why exactly *that* hits him square in the chest, tears immediately welling up again, but it does. He *did* try his best. He did. And even if it wasn’t enough, Ingo isn’t upset. The relief feels like an entire subway car being lifted from his shoulders.

They give Chandelure a few more minutes with Ingo before deciding to release the other Pokemon. One by one, they summon their team to reunite with their missing trainer, watching as the growing crowd of Pokemon swarm Ingo with happy, tearful cries.

Eelektross is nearly as emotional as Chandelure, blubbering and scooping Ingo into a crushing hug that Emmet has to rescue his brother from before Eelektross snaps his spine. Archeops trills a joyful sound and climbs up Ingo’s back to preen his hair, tail curling around his shoulders. Haxorus croons a low, sad sound, curling her whole body protectively around Ingo and the other Pokemon.

Klinklang and Durant make pleased metallic sounds, the former grinding their gears as they circle Ingo and the latter skittering around his feet, mandibles clicking happily. Crustle nearly bowls Ingo over with his heavy shell in his rush for pets and nuzzles, and his brother is only saved by Excadrill’s bracing hug happening on Ingo’s other side.

Garbodor, much like Eelektross, immediately starts crying and sweeps Ingo into a hug that lifts him clear off the ground. Galvantula, ever the mother of the group, chitters worriedly at Ingo, crawling all over

him and making him laugh as his hair sticks up with static.

By the end of it, Ingo is buried in a swarm of Pokemon. Emmet and Elesa watch to make sure they're careful of Ingo's injury, but otherwise let them go wild. It's not like the two of them were any better upon seeing Ingo again.

Once everyone has calmed down a bit, Elesa releases her own Pokemon to reacquaint them with the missing sibling. While most of Elesa's Pokemon weren't as heartbroken over Ingo's disappearance, they're clearly still thrilled at his return. Zebstrika in particular, who has been protective of the three trainers since the early days of their Pokemon journey when he was just a blitzle. While normally a stoic Pokemon, today he butts his head into Ingo's free hand, snorting until Ingo scratches him behind the ears. Elesa's two emolga nuzzle against the man's neck, purring loud enough to be heard even from a few feet away.

Elesa, leaning on Emmet's shoulder, smirks and calls, "What do you think, Ingo? Have enough love and affection for one day?"

"It does not matter if the answer is yes," Emmet adds. "You are long overdue for it."

Ingo laughs from his place on the grass, the Pokemon crowded around him like a protective flock. He looks around with warm eyes, then straightens with something like excitement.

"Are they all friendly with new Pokemon?" Ingo asks.

Emmet blinks. "Yes?"

Elesa catches on before him, cackling. "Ingo, we're already taking up half the courtyard!"

Ingo gives her a sly look and reaches for the pokeballs at his belt. Then he releases his Hisuian Pokemon in a great flash of light. Emmet straightens up, curious as the Pokemon start to take shape.

A machamp flexes into being, then startles at the crowd of Pokemon, looking defensive and alarmed. Ingo calls out to him, and once the machamp spots his trainer sitting content and at ease, he relaxes too, looking around more curiously.

A tangrowth is next, the same giant mass of vines from the video. She looks overjoyed by the sight of so many friendly Pokemon, and

garbles happily as she toddles towards Eelektross first to introduce herself.

A magnezone next, blinking unconcernedly at the crowd before upping its magnetism and floating high enough to hang above them all. Elesa's two emolga chirp curiously and leap off zebstrika's head to glide up to Magnezone's smooth metal surface and investigate.

An alakazam forms from the fourth pokeball. His intelligent eyes flick over to Ingo immediately, assessing the situation, before he looks over to Emmet and Elesa, tilting his head with clear intelligence. Emmet stares back at the unnerving Pokemon, unsure of how he should greet it.

Fortunately, Emmet is distracted by the appearance of a probopass next, the rock type floating in place and looking a little overwhelmed before spotting Tangrowth. With a glance at Ingo, she gravitates towards the grass type like a child running to its mother.

And finally, there is Gliscor. The huge flying-ground type stretches like a cat once he's released, then blinks large golden eyes around his surroundings. His gaze lingers on the emolga overhead with predatory intent, but Ingo says something to the bat Pokemon and he nods, dutifully ignoring the little electric types. Gliscor hunkers down beside Ingo like a loafing cat, pushing his head into his trainer's free side until Ingo scratches under his chin.

With the addition of these six alone, the courtyard is *packed*.

"Ingo, what have you been *feeding* these things?" Elesa asks, mouth agape. They *are* all rather large. Emmet reaches over to close her jaw with a gentle click.

"Are your Pokemon alphas?" Emmet asks.

"Hm?" Ingo blinks, then looks down at the giant gliscor butting into his hand with a purr. Even hunched over, the dusky purple Pokemon towers over his brother. Chandelure looks a bit pouty about having to share Ingo's attention, but she's clearly not worried for his safety.

"Ah, no, not alphas," Ingo says, distracted. "Although I suppose Gliscor is a bit on the larger side. Still, an alpha gliscor would be twice his size."

Elesa visibly pales, and Emmet takes a deep breath, putting his hands together in front of his face. So not only was Ingo left to survive in the

wilderness against *normal* Pokemon, but his brother was fighting life and limb against literal giants that could use him as a toothpick. Perfect. Wonderful. His nightmares will love that fuel.

A glance at Elesa shows that her brow is pinched with thought as she also recovers from that information. “Was that steelix you and Akari fought here in Sinnoh an alpha?”

Oh. Right. Emmet recalls its unusual size and aggression, a terrifying rush of weight and metal whose sheer presence could be felt even through the screen.

But still…

“I have never heard of alpha Pokemon in the modern day,” Emmet points out.

Ingo tips his head in Emmet’s direction. “I believe Emmet is correct. I thought it could be an alpha as well at first glance, but it didn’t have the red eyes. Perhaps a descendant of one, shook up by our return to the present? It *was* rather large.”

“And pissed off,” Elesa mutters. Then she stiffens, stepping forward to jab a finger in Ingo’s direction. She’s only stopped from getting closer by the mountain of Pokémon blocking her path. “Speaking of! We never did get to scold you for how damn reckless you were during that fight!”

Ingo looks surprised. “Reckless?”

Emmet’s smile strains. “You shot into battle on Gliscor’s *back*. And then *stayed* in the middle of the fight.”

Instead of looking sheepish, Ingo seems genuinely confused. He lets Gliscor leave his grasp to investigate the happy chatter and play-fighting of the other Pokemon.

“That is always how I battle,” Ingo says simply. “Akari as well.”

“Akari is a literal child who was repeatedly thrown into life-threatening situations,” Elesa says, eye twitching. “She isn’t exactly a bastion of safe behavior.”

“How else can you see the battle’s movements properly?” Ingo asks, frowning.

“From *behind* the Pokemon!” Emmet exclaims. “It is basic safety protocol!”

“That does not sound like an adequate strategy for directing a Pokemon battle.”

Emmet feels a long-snuffed spark of sibling rivalry light in his chest. He grins, gaze flicking to the dirt battlefield nearby. “Oh? I am Emmet. I can show you.”

To Emmet’s delight, Ingo straightens from his relaxed posture, something familiar flashing across his face. “A battle?”

“Oh no you don’t,” Elesa protests, stepping between them. “Ingo *just* got out of the hospital, Emmet!”

Before Emmet can back down, Ingo’s eyes narrow, something dangerously close to a smile twitching at his lips. “A one-on-one, then. To keep it quick.”

Elesa looks reluctant to dampen Ingo’s enthusiasm, even as the responsibility of keeping him safe weighs on her.

“One battle,” Emmet says. “Pleeease, Elesa?”

Elesa could never resist when both brothers gave her lillipup eyes, and that seems to hold true even now. She finally sighs and steps back, waving them off. “Fine, fine. *One* battle, got it?”

Emmet cheers.

“If Ingo gets hurt I’m killing you both,” Elesa mutters, moving to the side of the battle area with clear intentions of refereeing the match.

Ingo gently extracts himself from the lively dogpile of Pokemon, and he and Emmet station themselves on either side of the training field behind the hotel. Chandelure is still glued to Ingo’s side. The rest of their Pokemon gather curiously at the edge of the arena to watch.

“Archeops!” Emmet calls. The ancient bird squawks an eager sound and runs to his side, planting himself in front of Emmet.

Ingo looks at Archeops for a moment with a calculating gaze (does he remember the fossil Pokemon’s typing?) before calling, “Machamp.”

The machamp flexes and steps forward to face Archeops, looking determined.

Emmet is almost surprised that Ingo didn't pick Chandelure, but then he remembers that Ingo wouldn't even be familiar with her moves. And if he's trying to show them how he battles Hisui-style, it makes sense that he would pick a Pokemon actually used to that tactic.

Still, something about it feels…wrong. From the hurt look Chandelure gives her trainer as he gently detaches her and instructs her to stay back, she feels the same.

But then Ingo is stepping forward, right at Machamp's side. His brother hunches slightly, tense, as if ready to launch into battle himself. His gentle gaze sharpens, and Emmet feels strangely small with such an intense expression directed at him and Archeops.

Emmet shakes it off. It's time to battle.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> Ingo and Emmet have their battle! Brace yourself, because the tracks ahead are shaky.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Elesa lifts her arm, and for a moment all is silent. Then, she brings it down with a shout of, “Battle!”

“Earthquake!” Emmet calls, hoping to get the first move.

Archeops slams his clawed wings into the ground, the dirt of the battle arena cracking as fissures snake out from the fossil Pokemon’s form. Machamp winces as the ground under his feet breaks apart and throws him off-balance.

“Steady,” Ingo says, calm.

His brother is standing on the edge of the attack’s range, *far* too close to the fight. Emmet watches him for a moment, both to make sure he is all right and to see if he is going to launch a counterattack. To Emmet’s surprise, Ingo doesn’t. He simply waits, jaw clenched against the vibrations of the earthquake.

Emmet narrows his eyes, but commands, “Aerial ace!”

Archeops flares his wings and shoots forward in a blink.

“Agile style, ice punch!” Ingo barks.

Agile style?

Quicker than should be possible, Machamp intercepts the aerial ace, using four fists glistening with ice to catch the brunt of the attack. The fighting type skids back a few inches, but Archeops also squawks an unhappy sound at the ice frosting over his feathers.

Emmet opens his mouth to call out the next move, but he’s shocked when Ingo beats him to the punch—literally.

“Agile style! Fire punch!”

“Protect!” Emmet counters.

Once again, the machamp moves faster than Emmet expects. He manages to hammer two fiery fists down onto Archeops before the fossil Pokemon’s protect bubbles up around him, deflecting the two remaining punches with a quiet thud.

“Archeops, get some space!”

Archeops does as asked, letting his protect drop so he can scramble back a few yards, out of the machamp’s reach.

Ingo crosses over to machamp’s other side, watching Archeops with cold, calculating eyes. Emmet glares back, trying to think of a new strategy while the two Pokemon catch their breath.

Ah-ha!

“Archeops, aerial ace—get behind it!” Emmet shouts.

Archeops chirps and slices across the battlefield as a blur of colorful feathers, twisting between the machamp’s arms to get a clear view of his back. Perfect.

“Rock slide!” Emmet calls, grinning.

His grin slips when he sees Ingo whirl and, inexplicably, step *closer* to Machamp, right in the line of fire. He crouches, tilting his head as if trying to figure something out.

“Archeops, wait—" Emmet chokes.

But Archeops doesn’t hear him, already summoning great boulder-sized jags of rock from the dirt and sending them towards Machamp at crushing speed. For a heart-stopping second, Emmet fears he’s going to watch a twisted mirror of Ingo being attacked by that steelix’s stealth rock, with his brother taken down by Emmet’s own Pokemon instead.

But then Ingo is nodding and rolling out of the way at the last moment, commanding, “Agile style! Fire punch!”

And the machamp moves to meet the rock slide halfway, fiery fists jabbing out with precise hits to shatter the boulders before they can slam into either of them. Pebbles and shards of rock rain down on the pair, but both Machamp and Ingo look unbothered.

Emmet swallows hard and flicks his hands, trying to banish his moment of terror and slip back into the battle headspace. “A-Archeops, one more aerial ace!”

If he can just land a *hit* with this, the super effective move will slow the machamp down considerably.

To Emmet’s surprise, Ingo doesn’t command Machamp to move. He simply takes a step back, right behind the machamp’s shoulder, and waits. Machamp follows the wordless command and braces himself, crossing his four arms defensively.

Archeops slices through the air and slams into the machamp. The fighting type grunts at the hit, but stays standing.

Ingo commands, “Strong style—bullet punch!"

Emmet’s eyes widen. Bullet punch? Machamp knows *bullet* punch? He opens his mouth to shout a garbled cry of a warning.

Machamp’s four firsts shine silver, as if a sheen of metal has coated his skin. Before archeops can even try to dodge, the priority move is already in motion. The fighting type moves far faster than his bulk would suggest, and lunges into a punch like a missile.

Archeops doesn’t stand a chance. With a shriek, the fossil Pokemon is slammed into the ground hard enough to make a crater in the dirt. The super-effective steel type move has clearly taken its toll, and after a moment of straining to rise again, Archeops falls limp.

Emmet blinks, stunned. It’s not that Emmet necessarily expected Ingo to lose, but…one bullet punch took Archeops down? How powerful *is* that machamp? Ingo *did* say strong style before—does that somehow change the attack’s power?

Ingo stays tense for a moment longer, crouched with that same focused expression, as if to make sure Archeops really is knocked out. His hat is low over his face, leaving one silver eye showing. Finally, Elesa seems to come back to herself. She stutters out an end to the match, with Ingo as the victor.

Ingo straightens, fixing the way his coat has shifted to sit crooked on his shoulders. His expression softens to satisfaction, back to a normal Ingo smile as he tips his hat. “Bravo, Emmet! Excellent match.”

And Emmet finally exhales, trying to ignore the way his hands are

shaking.

He and Ingo learned how to battle together. They have always been mirrored versions of each other, down to their movements and body language. And while some of that remains, his brother's battle style is now very, verrry…different.

Emmet isn't sure he likes different.

Still, the old catchphrase puts something in him at ease, so he lets the nervous energy out in a bout of laughter. "What the hell was that, Ingo?"

He doesn't even know what he's asking about. The "styles" Ingo used? The reckless but precise way Ingo wove between the battle? The bullet punch that Ingo had clearly been holding onto for a surprise finish?

Ingo gives Machamp a pat on the arm and a quiet word of thanks, then walks across the field to Emmet. Chandelure hurries to trail after him.

"I believe that was me proving my point."

This time, Emmet's laugh is more genuine as he shoots his brother a playful glare. "I was unprepared. Wait until next time."

"I will look forward to it."

"You must also teach me those 'styles' you used."

Ingo's mouth twitches with a smile. "Of course."

"Well, that was fucking nuts," Elesa sighs, walking up to them and shaking her head. "Congrats, Ingo, you somehow became even more terrifying of a battler. Your side okay?"

To Emmet's relief (he'd gotten so caught up in the battle he'd nearly forgotten that Ingo was injured), Ingo nods, carefully stretching the side where his stitches are. "I believe so. No pain, at least."

While Emmet kneels down with a hyper potion to heal up Archeops, giving his scaly head a few pets of thanks, Ingo and Elesa work on rounding up the rest of the Pokemon into their pokeballs (after politely asking Excadrill, Alakazam, and Tangrowth to help even out the battlefield again).

Chandelure refuses to go back inside her pokeball, angry at the very

idea. Ingo quickly crumbles under her determined gaze, and relents with a sigh while pocketing her empty ball. Satisfied, she whistles a happy sound and twirls around him.

“Well, we shouldn’t have to worry about her wandering off,” Elesa snorts.

Emmet recalls Archeops and nods, watching the ghost type. “I believe we will have more trouble getting her to *leave* Ingo’s side.”

They inspect the rest of the courtyard to make sure the Pokemon didn’t dig any holes or mess up the landscaping before heading back inside.

“I’m surprised someone from the hotel staff didn’t come yell at us about battling so hard. Or at least to put some of our Pokemon back in their pokeballs,” Elesa says as they cross back into cool air conditioning.

“It could have been worse,” Emmet jokes, nudging Ingo with a grin. “At least I did not bring a horde of joltik this time.”

When he glances at his brother, Ingo is blinking back at him, clearly lost. “Joltik?”

Oh. Right. Emmet falters. His brother wouldn’t get that inside joke, because he…doesn’t remember it.

“Nothing,” Emmet lies, pasting on a smile. “What should we do next? Eat?”

Right on cue. Ingo’s stomach growls, loud enough for all three of them to hear. Emmet laughs as his brother flushes, and Elesa grins.

“Food,” she agrees. “It’s getting close to dinner time anyways!”

Elesa and Emmet debate briefly over *where* to eat, while Ingo watches their argument go back and forth like a Pokemon battle. Eventually, it’s decided they’ll stick with the little restaurant that’s an offshoot of the hotel lobby, since going out into the city risks not only being spotted, even in Sinnoh, but navigating the busy streets and their crowds, both of which Ingo clearly isn’t accustomed to at the moment.

The hotel restaurant is starting to fill up its tables when they enter, but it’s dim and cozy and Ingo visibly relaxes as soon as they step inside and request a table. While they wait for the server to return,

Elesa heads to the restroom.

Ingo, meanwhile, pets Chandelure absentmindedly as she hovers at his side. He's eyeing the sign by the door listing tonight's specials, lingering on some kind of grilled magikarp dish.

"What will you get? The magikarp special?" Emmet teases, elbowing Ingo.

Ingo's brow furrows at Emmet's joking tone. "I quite enjoy magikarp, actually. Gliscor would often bring them back for me to cook."

Emmet's smile fades as his silly little heart sinks. Ingo never *used* to like magikarp. In fact, he hated it. Is it even possible for memory loss to affect his brother's taste buds? Maybe he just got used to the taste while in Hisui.

Regardless, Emmet slaps on a strained smile. "Well! That's new. You got sick from a magikarp dish when we were young and ever since then you've avoided it at all costs."

Ingo frowns, looking back at the sign as if it could answer his unspoken question.

"Do you remember that?" Emmet asks, hopeful.

Ingo frowns harder at the sign. "I…I don't know."

"One time Elesa tried to fry us some magikarp on our journey to apologize for a fight we had, and she was so upset once she realized you hated the flavor that she almost cried," Emmet presses. Desperate. Maybe if he can get Ingo to remember this, the rest of the memories will follow!

But Ingo shakes his head. "I don't think—"

Ingo cuts off with a grunt of pain, hand moving up to clutch at his head. Emmet's stomach drops as he steadies his brother. Chandelure chimes an alarmed noise, floating higher to see Ingo's face.

"What's happening?" Elesa gasps, rushing back to them from the bathroom. "Ingo?"

"I-I'm fine," Ingo says, breath short. "Just…tried too hard to recall."

Elesa gives Emmet a warning glare, clearly guessing *why* Ingo pushed himself. Emmet winces under the look, shame bubbling hot in his gut.

He didn't mean to hurt Ingo. He just…wants his brother back. The *old* Ingo. He said in the hospital that this Ingo was still his Ingo, and that is true. But every little reminder that he is different cuts into Emmet like a knife.

It hurts more than he expected.

Elesa sighs and guides Ingo to sit down in a nearby chair. Chandelure settles in his lap. Emmet sits beside his brother, guilty, and doesn't look up to join the conversation again until they're called to their table.

Ingo sits Chandelure down at the fourth seat of their table (her little face and flames peeking over the edge is hilarious *and* adorable, in Emmet's humble opinion) and they all settle in. Ingo seems surprised by the waiter bringing them waters and straws, and mutters something about Beni losing customers. Elesa gives him a puzzled but amused look, then starts up a new conversation about the food options on the menus they've been given. Once Emmet selects a dish close to his usual favorites, some kind of pasta, he tentatively joins in the gym leader's chatter as she tells Ingo about the inner workings of modern restaurants.

Ingo, in turn, chuckles and gives them a brief rundown of the closest thing to a restaurant they had in Hisui—a little potato mochi shop with a chef who wasn't winning any customer service awards any time soon.

When their waiter returns and takes their orders, Emmet is unsurprised but disappointed by Ingo's order of a salad and the magikarp special they'd seen.

"Going with the healthy options, huh?" Elesa teases, apparently choosing not to question it.

"Ah, I simply believe it is best for me to keep the meal as light as possible for now," Ingo says, a little awkward.

"You survived a pecha cake," Emmet points out, before he can stop himself.

Elesa gapes, giving Emmet a poisonous glare. "You didn't."

"It was last night, before the nurse told us not to," Emmet says with a remorse-free shrug. "Ingo was fine."

Elesa gives Ingo a piercing look, and he shifts, avoiding her gaze.

Emmet blinks. “Ingo?”

“I did have a…bit of a stomach ache, this morning,” Ingo finally admits, looking embarrassed. “I didn’t want to make a fuss about it.”

Elesa sighs, and Emmet puts his head in his hands, suddenly much less hungry. He gives his brother an upset look. “You didn’t tell me.”

Ingo looks upset in turn. “They were delicious! I didn't want to make you feel guilty for such a generous gift.”

Ah, so Ingo is just as self-sacrificial as he has always been for Emmet. Except now he does not remember the *many* talks they have had over the years about *telling* Emmet and Elesa when something is wrong.

Great.

Emmet groans, pushing his palms into his eyes. “Ingo, you have to tell us if something is wrong.”

Chandelure agrees with a scolding chime, barely stopping herself from levitating out of her seat.

Ingo still looks reluctant, so Elesa reaches over to take one of his hands in hers. “Please, Ingo. We just want to make sure you’re okay.”

Ingo flushes, clearly overwhelmed by the attention, but looks at his plate with a reluctant nod. “I…will try.”

The next few minutes of conversation are quieter, stilted and tense before Elesa—Zekrom bless her—manages to revive the mood back into something casual and upbeat. When their food arrives, Ingo is clearly delighted by his fancy cut of grilled magikarp, garnished with some herbs and a light sauce. Even then, he eats less than Emmet would like, giving Chandelure the scraps, but Emmet supposes his brother is used to smaller portions after surviving in the mountains for so long, so he lets it go.

Afterwards, they head back to the lobby, full and content. Ingo is clearly growing weary by the way he leans on Chandelure for support, probably still recovering from his stressful stint in the hospital after the steelix attack. Emmet and Elesa make a wordless group decision to return to their room. On the way up, Ingo slowly spins around the elevator like a wide-eyed child, and Emmet happily shows him how to

press the light-up buttons to take them to the right place.

By time they've made it back to their floor, Emmet realizes he hasn't even gotten to *see* the room yet. He trusts that Elesa booked them someplace nice, but he still looks around curiously as soon as she unlocks the door.

There are two queen-sized beds, some fancy-looking wall lamps curving between them. A nice flatscreen TV sits on the opposite wall, and a small sitting couch rests across the room, in front of the window. Their suitcases (and a few shopping bags) line the wall beneath the TV. A doorway off to the side leads to what Emmet is sure is a restroom. Overall, the room is nice, a tad chilly and smelling fresh and clean.

Ingo is notably impressed by the space, standing in the middle of it and looking around as if he's afraid to sit or touch anything. Chandelure has no such reservations, and floats over to one of the beds to plop down, nestling into the fluffy pillows.

Emmet sits on the edge of the same bed and pats the spot beside him.

Ingo hesitates, frowning, and glances down at his clothes.

"Your clothes were just washed," Emmet reminds him.

"Ah, yes, but I still have not bathed today, so…"

Oh, that makes sense. Ingo doesn't want to get anything dirty. Well, that's an easy enough fix! While Emmet is more of a morning shower kind of guy, Ingo has always preferred taking his in the evening, so this is perfect timing.

"Shower?" Emmet asks. "You will feel better after cleaning up."

Ingo blinks at him, then glances outside. "It's getting dark."

Ah. Right. Bathing in the mountains likely had to happen during the day. Well, this is one old habit Emmet can give back to his brother!

"We have electricity for a reason, dearest brother!" Emmet chirps, moving to his feet and taking Ingo's hand to guide him towards the bathroom. Ingo doesn't protest, realization dawning on his face. Elesa pulls out a set of clean clothes and passes them over to Emmet as he passes.

A knock at the door interrupts the process. The three exchange questioning looks, but Ingo is clearly confused and Emmet shrugs, so Elesa gets up to answer it.

She opens the door a crack, then a bit wider as she says, “Akari! Hey!”

“Hi Elesa!”

Emmet and Ingo lean as one to catch sight of Akari in the doorway. The girl sees them and grins, waving over Elesa’s shoulder. “Hey, guys!”

“Where’s the rest of the entourage?” Elesa asks, stepping back.

“Barry and Lucas crashed as soon as we made it to the hotel room,” Akari explains with a shrug. “Apparently they didn’t sleep at all last night since they were determined to get to me as soon as possible. Mom’s watching them so they don’t panic while I’m gone.”

“Well, come on in then,” Elesa says, re-entering the room and waving Akari in after her. “Emmet was just about to reintroduce Ingo to the wonders of a hot shower.”

Akari brightens. “Oh, you are going to *love* it, Uncle.”

Ingo gives her a fond but puzzled look and dutifully follows Emmet into the spacious, bright bathroom.

“You know how sinks work,” Emmet starts off, putting the clean clothes on the counter and glancing at Ingo.

Ingo nods, giving the sink a reverent look. “I do! It’s incredible, not having to fetch your own water from a stream.”

Emmet smiles. “Yup! Well, this is even better.”

Emmet moves to the shower, pointing out the shampoo and soap, and shows his brother how to turn the water on, laughing when Ingo startles and whispers, awestruck, “Like a rain dance!”

Ingo is even more delighted when Emmet shows him how to turn the water hot.

“It's as warm as the Snowfall Hot Spring,” Ingo murmurs, feeling the spray.

Emmet grins. “Verrrry neat, right? Do you need anything else?”

Ingo hesitates, then shakes his head.

“I will be right outside. Call if you need me,” Emmet says, stepping out the door and shutting it behind him.

Elesa and Akari are already lying side-by side on one of the beds, laughing at some kind of game show on TV. They’re making guesses at the answers despite the fact that Elesa almost certainly can’t understand the Sinnohan questions. Chandelure is still dozing on the other bed. Emmet lies down carefully so he won’t disturb her, turning his Xtrans on.

As expected, the little device is flooded with notifications. Luckily, seemingly none from the media (Volkner had apparently kept his friend’s video of the steelix attack on lockdown), but *plenty* from happy colleagues and acquaintances. Elesa must have already told them about Ingo.

Emmet sighs, overwhelmed by the thought of responding to them all. Instead, he locks the device again and puts it aside, flipping over to watch the TV and join the girls in their silly guesses.

When the episode ends, Elesa and Akari roll off the bed, grabbing a hotel key card as if to leave.

Emmet sits up. “Where are you going?”

“We’re gonna grab some drinks and find the ice machine,” Elesa says, stretching. “Think you two can survive ten minutes without us?”

Emmet snorts. “Ingo survived Hisui. He can handle a shower.”

“Fine, fine. Be back soon.”

Just as the door shuts behind the two, the water in the bathroom turns off. Emmet hears a quiet footstep over the noise of the television. He hums, flipping through the channels for something else to watch. After cycling through the channels twice, he finally settles on some silly cooking competition that he can at least follow, even if he doesn’t understand the language.

Emmet zones out for a few minutes as one of the contestants forgets to add *eggs* of all things to a cake. Even Emmet doesn’t usually mess up that badly when he tries to cook. But when the next commercial break comes on, Emmet realizes that Ingo still hasn’t come out of the bathroom.

“Ingo?” Emmet calls, cautious.

The silence that follows sends a ridiculous swoop of fear into his gut. He’s afraid of that silence. Afraid to drown in it like he has been for three years. Afraid that Arceus has once again scooped his brother right out of existence.

“Ingo?” No response. Nervously, Emmet gets to his feet and knocks on the door. “Ingo!”

Finally, Emmet hears Ingo shift in response to his brother's panic. He opens the door with wet hair and a worried frown. He's wearing his pants and there's a towel slung over his shoulders. Steam billows out from the small room. “Emmet?”

Emmet relaxes, feeling incredibly silly for all of two seconds before his eyes flick down.

Oh. Emmet was correct about there being a scar at Ingo's collarbone. Emmet was unfortunately *also* right about Ingo hiding more scars under his hospital gown. Deep, healed-over furrows of claws and teeth at his chest and stomach, clearly meant to go for the kill. A burn scar curving around his right side from his back. A rib that juts out just a bit too noticeably to be anything but a poorly-healed injury.

Mindlessly, Emmet reaches out a hand to touch. As if he could retroactively fix them through willpower alone.

Ingo stiffens and leans away, then turns to head back into the bathroom. But he leaves the door open. Emmet follows him in, as if pulled on a string.

Ingo moves to the mirror and leans forward to frown at the beard he had grown while in Hisui.

“I was considering shaving it,” Ingo says, clearly trying to ignore Emmet gawking at his newly revealed scars.

Emmet knows it’s rude to stare. And he *knows* he’s making Ingo uncomfortable. His brother is even giving him an out, a conversation topic to latch onto. But Emmet can’t just see this whole new map of pain and injury so close to Ingo’s heart and organs and *life* and not be completely overtaken by fear once again.

Before, he’d thought it was painful hearing the individual stories for the scars on Ingo’s legs and arms. Now, Emmet finds that somehow,

not knowing is worse. He opens his mouth to speak, and Ingo grunts and leans closer to the mirror, clearly on edge and wanting Emmet to just *stop. Staring.*

But he can't.

"Ingo, what..?" Emmet whispers, unable to keep himself from brushing a careful hand over the knotted scar on Ingo's lower back.

Ingo flinches, yanking himself away from Emmet's touch. He knocks Elesa's hair products from the counter in the process, causing a loud clatter as they fall to the floor. Ingo presses himself back to the far corner of the bathroom, eyes a bit wild. Not quite panic, but *verrry* close to it.

The expression tears straight through Emmet.

His brother looks like a wild Pokemon. The scars snaking across his chest and stomach twist and move with each heaving breath. So Emmet *approaches* him like a wild Pokemon, one hurt and lost in the subways.

He crouches, and Ingo's eyes focus enough to flick to him, drawn to the movement. Emmet tries to still the shaking in his own fingers as he holds up his hands with a strained smile. "It's all right, Ingo. It is just me. Just Emmet. Your brother."

For a moment, Ingo continues to stare at him with barely-there eyes. Then, slowly, Emmet sees as his brother comes back to himself. Ingo blinks, again and again, as his tense muscles relax.

Emmet smiles, hoping the expression isn't as shaky as he feels. "Are you back?"

Ingo nods, jerking his head. He mops a hand over his face.

"Do…" Emmet hesitates. "Do you want me to leave?"

Somehow, despite Emmet offering, Ingo's answering nod still makes him bite his lip to keep from crying. Emmet takes a deep breath and stands, mechanically walking out of the bathroom and plopping himself down on the bed by Chandelure. The ghost type wakes with a sleepy chime.

Emmet finds the remote for the TV and flips mindlessly through the channels again just to give himself something to do, even as he fails to

register the images flickering onscreen.

The bathroom door doesn't close.

Distantly, Emmet hears the rustle of clothing and the light flicking off, and then Ingo steps back into the room, a long-sleeved shirt covering him from prying eyes. He puts his tattered coat on too, finally looking up at Emmet. Emmet looks away.

"I apologize. For that reaction," Ingo says, quiet. Quieter than he ever used to be.

"It is fine, Ingo," Emmet says, smile strained as he flips through the channels again.

Chandelure must sense the tense atmosphere. She drifts into the air and floats to Ingo's side.

"That scar," Ingo starts, looking uncomfortable as he pets the fire type. "In Hisui, there was—"

"You don't have to talk about Hisui," Emmet cuts in, a little desperate as he mutes the TV. "Never again. You're home. It doesn't matter now, right?"

Ingo's head snaps up, an alarmed look on his face. "What?"

Emmet's anxiety pools in his chest, tight and hard to breathe through. "We can just…forget it happened. Go back to normal. To how it was before."

Ingo frowns. Shakes his head. "Emmet, I thought we…you know I cannot do that."

"Why?" Emmet snaps, distantly registering that he is losing control of himself but unable to stop it. He is a runaway train on the tracks. "Why can't we just pretend it never happened?"

"Because it *did* happen, Emmet," Ingo stresses, the first flash of anger appearing in his body language. Chandelure gives her trainer a worried look. "It happened and it is *all I remember*."

Emmet winces, tears pooling in his eyes as his heart roars in his ears. "But even if you can't remember *before,* it's Hisui that's making you different *now!* I said before that you are still Ingo, but..."

Ingo looks stricken, taking a step back as Chandelure balances him.

Emmet knows he should stop. He can’t.

“Emmet,” Ingo says, quiet.

“You *are* different. You are hurt and quiet and scared and I *hate* it, I hate that it can’t just be how it used to be and—"

“Emmet!”

“And that I could not be there with you in Hisui. I missed you so much but you are not—you don’t remember any of our jokes! Or our journey! Or how we used to battle! You are Ingo but you are also *not* Ingo and—"

“*Emmet!"* Ingo shouts.

Emmet stops. Aside from his ragged breathing, a wave of silence follows Ingo's yell. Ingo stares at Emmet with a heartbreaking expression, pained and angry as tears roll down his stoic face.

“I *know* I am not the brother you have been searching for,” Ingo says, fists clenched tight and voice shaking with emotion. “And I am sorry. But I…I can’t *be* him, no matter how much we both wish I could.”

And with that, Ingo spins on his heel and escapes the hotel room, the heavy door slamming shut behind him. Chandelure gives Emmet a sad look before phasing through the wall to follow her trainer.

Leaving Emmet alone.

Chapter End Notes

...I'm sorry? ^^'

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Ingo talks about Hisui, and Emmet is finally ready to listen.

Emmet stares at the closed door, not even realizing he's crying until he hears the quiet drip of tears hitting the carpet. It jolts him from his stunned state, and he registers what just happened.

Ingo left.

Emmet upset Ingo, pushed him far enough that Ingo *yelled* at him (Ingo has not shouted at him since they were teenagers), and then his brother—his traumatized, injured brother—ran off in tears.

Ingo left. He left and now he's in the middle of a huge hotel he doesn't know how to navigate and Emmet made his brother cry and what if Ingo disappears again? What if Emmet looks away and now Ingo vanishes forever?

"Ingo," Emmet whispers, as panic surges in his chest. He scrambles to his feet and chases after his brother, yanking open the door to the hallway. "*Ingo!"*

Of course, his brother is nowhere to be seen. Instead, Elesa and Akari —walking back to the room with ice in tow—stop in place in the middle of the hallway.

"Emmet?" Akari asks.

Emmet doesn't answer, his legs buckling under the crushing fear building in his chest. He can't seem to get enough air.

Distantly, he hears the crash of the ice bucket being dropped, and then there's Elesa, blue eyes filling his vision as she crouches in front of him. One of her hands settles on his arm and the other on his cheek, steadying him.

"Em? Em, what happened?" Elesa asks.

"I-Ingo. I upset Ingo and he ran off and he's *gone* again and I don't—" Emmet chokes on his words. "What if he never comes back?"

Elesa makes a soothing sound, rubbing at his arm. "We'll find him,

Em. It'll be okay. Deep breaths."

"Chandelure is still with him, right?" Akari asks, crouched on his other side. "She'll take care of him."

That *does* help. Tremendously. Emmet nods, shaky, and wipes at his eyes.

"We do need to find him," Elesa says after a moment, biting her lip and clearly trying not to let her own fear show. "Just to make sure he's okay."

"Should we split up?" Akari asks. Her eyes flick to Emmet. "You two can stay together, but I can look somewhere else?"

Elesa gives the girl a grateful look. "Sounds good."

"I'll check outside, then," Akari says with a determined nod, standing and pulling out one of her wooden pokeballs. "You two look around in here."

Elesa nods, and Akari takes off.

After a minute or two, Emmet gathers himself enough to stand. He smears tears across his face and gently nudges Elesa off.

"We should split up, too."

Elesa looks concerned. "Em—"

"I'm okay. Really. I just want to find Ingo."

Elesa doesn't seem convinced, but after a moment she nods and releases one of her emolga. The little Pokemon chirps a cheerful greeting before seeing their faces.

"We're looking for Ingo," Elesa tells it. "Want to help?"

The emolga nods with a serious expression and scampers up Elesa's shoulder to point ahead with a determined squeak.

Elesa flashes it a quick smile, then looks back to Emmet. "I'll search the public areas like the lobby and pool if you want to take each of the regular floors?"

Oh, thank Arceus. She has a plan. Emmet latches onto it, nodding, and releases his galvantula for his own moral support. After a quick

explanation to the spider, Emmet and Elesa part ways.

Emmet and Galvantula start at the top of the building and take each floor systematically, the electric type scampering down the hallway in one direction and Emmet the other until they circle around and meet in the middle to search the next one. Emmet tries to stay focused on their task and not think about Ingo running off into the city in a panic. He likely stayed close, just…hidden.

Well, the old Ingo would have.

Emmet winces at the comparison, seeing Ingo's grief-stricken face again.

"I can't be him. No matter how much we both wish I could."

Emmet shakes his head and smacks his cheeks to try and keep the spiraling thoughts at bay. No. No! That is his *brother*, different as he may be, and Emmet *will* find him again. He has to be around here somewhere!

Still, by time Emmet makes it halfway down the building, he is panting and there's a hitching sob at the end of each breath. Galvantula gives him an encouraging chitter and a nuzzle of her head each time they reunite at the elevator.

They're just about to head to the next floor when Emmet hears a familiar voice.

"Emmet!" Akari shouts, running to him from the other end of the long hall, her footsteps muted thumps against the plush carpet. "I found Uncle!"

Emmet's heart stutters with relief and fear, all at once. "Is he all right?"

Akari slows to a stop in front of Emmet, panting. She nods, then points up. "He's on the roof. He said I could tell you."

Emmet stares, more than a little worried about the fact that his brother is on the roof of a *verrry* tall hotel building. How did he even get up there? Akari doesn't seem worried about Ingo's safety, though, so Emmet tries to calm his nerves. "How did you—"

"I had Braviary take me. I thought Uncle might want to be somewhere high to calm down. Reminds him of the mountains, I think."

For a brief moment Emmet feels a bolt of—of *something*. Jealousy? Anger at the kind young girl in front of him? *He* should know Ingo best. He always used to know Ingo best.

But that is not what is important right now. And Akari is only helping, as she has from the start. Clinging too hard to how Emmet and Ingo *used* to be is what set his brother off in the first place. So Emmet takes a deep breath, holds it, then lets it out with a shake of his hands. A little better. He'll feel much better once he sees Ingo.

When he opens his eyes again, Akari is patiently waiting. She lifts her pokeball. "Do you want me to give you a lift? I don't think the staff want people up there, but if we're quiet about it we should be okay."

Emmet nods, jerky and uncomfortable. He is…not a huge fan of flying on Pokemon-back. It just feels a little too out of bounds of safety protocol. But he will do whatever he has to in order to get to Ingo.

After thanking and recalling Galvantula, Akari leads them down to the first floor, out through the back entrance and to the corner of the battle arena. There, she releases a braviary. It's the wrong colors even for a shiny, and just a bit too large, with a glowing crest of feathers at its head.

"Hisuian variant," Akari explains, nimbly climbing atop the giant bird and offering Emmet a hand. "He's gentle, I promise."

Emmet swallows his fear and takes her small hand, letting her help him up onto the bird's back. Emmet sits behind Akari, awkwardly holding onto the girl's sweatshirt by his fingertips.

"You're gonna have to hold on a bit tighter," Akari says.

Emmet hesitates, uncomfortable with a stranger's touch even on his best days, but lets her guide his arms around her middle to hold on.

"All right. Ready, Braviary!"

Braviary chirps, then beats at the ground with heavy, impressive wings, quickly lifting off and gaining altitude. Emmet is grateful now for his firm grip on Akari, and pointedly ignores the ground getting smaller and smaller beneath them.

"Hisuian braviary are flying and psychic types," Akari says, almost yelling to be heard over the growing wind as they circle higher into the sky on city updrafts.

Despite Emmet's low thrum of terror, he manages to get enough air in his lungs to ask, "Really?"

Akari nods, obviously pleased with his thinly-veiled curiosity. "Mhm! They're really cool! They learn a move called esper wing and they blast psychic shockwaves at lakes to hunt! It's super neat."

Emmet hums, intrigued even as they rise endlessly beside the tall building. "I am Emmet. I would like to battle you two sometime."

Akari laughs. "Deal! Braviary and I would love that! If you're half as good as Uncle Ingo, then it'll be an awesome fight."

Emmet's lips twitch into a smile. "I assure you I am just as good as my brother." Even if Ingo did beat his ass earlier today.

Akari whoops, clearly thrilled, and Emmet realizes they're finally nearing the top of the building. The city lies stretched out below them, millions of lights blanketing the darkness.

"How did Ingo get up here?" Emmet says, mostly to himself.

"Probably Gliscor," Akari answers. "If they couldn't get a good updraft they would've just climbed."

Ah. Right. His brother had been equally uneasy about riding atop Pokemon before his disappearance, but judging from his entrance into battle against that steelix, Emmet supposes that has changed as well.

They crest the top of the building, high above most of the city, and Emmet frantically searches the roof for a familiar form. His brother is sitting on top of the tall, glowing letters of the hotel's name, underlit by the light. Chandelure and Gliscor sit close on either side of him. Ingo looks up when he sees Braviary's glowing crest in the dark sky. He doesn't wave or call out to them, but he doesn't run away, either.

Emmet breathes a sigh of relief, barely keeping himself from squeezing poor Akari to death. "He is all right."

"Of course!" Akari says, shooting Emmet a grin over her shoulder. "Uncle Ingo's super strong!"

Emmet nods, hesitant, only able to think about Ingo panicking in the bathroom like an injured patrat. But no, Ingo *is* strong, Emmet knows that. He is just…worried.

Braviary carries them down to the roof and lands, crouching low so Emmet can slide off on unsteady legs.

“I’ll tell Elesa that we found him,” Akari says as Braviary stands tall again.

Emmet nods, unable to voice his gratitude.

“Good luck,” Akari tells Emmet with a double thumbs-up. “You’ve got this.”

And with that vague encouragement, Akari wordlessly urges her braviary into the air and over the edge of the building.

Emmet is left standing in the colorful wash of light from the hotel sign. The world around them is all dark sky and a sea of city lights like fallen stars. The distant sounds of the city float up, barely reaching them so high in the air.

Emmet takes a breath and walks over to look up at his brother. He can’t seem to get his words to work, but hopes his pleading expression gets his feelings across.

Ingo stares back at him, then finally sighs and gets to his feet. “I will be down in a moment.”

Emmet had assumed that Gliscor gave Ingo a lift up onto the tall lettering as well, but he has to bite back an exclamation when Ingo casually swings himself over the side of the towering sign. He manages to hang on and climb his way down in just a few seconds, landing safely on his feet. He doesn’t even look winded. Gliscor and Chandelure glide down to rest on either side of him.

Emmet wants to rush forward and hug Ingo, so relieved to see that he’s still here and he’s okay, but he isn’t sure Ingo would welcome that right now. Instead, Emmet puts a steadying hand on the warm side of the lettering, trying not to look frazzled by his brother swinging around ten foot tall signs like it’s second nature.

Emmet doesn’t succeed, if the cautious look Ingo sends him is anything to gauge by.

“I am fine. Just worrying about my feral mankey of a brother,” Emmet croaks.

Ingo frowns, his eyes flicking to the sign and back. “I do not

understand that saying. You…don't like climbing?"

Emmet scrubs a hand over his face, turning to put his back to the sign so he can slide to the ground. "I would not mind the climbing if you were taking the proper safety precautions."

"Ah." Ingo hesitates, then lowers himself to sit beside Emmet. "I admit I'm not entirely sure how I would even follow such protocol here, without Lady Sneasler's assistance. To traverse the Highlands, it was either climbing into her basket or testing your luck with your own hands."

Gliscor gives the sky a longing expression, and Ingo nods. With a happy trill, the giant Pokemon launches itself into the sky to glide loops and circles around the building's rooftop. Chandelure elects to stay at Ingo's side, settling down against his leg.

"I did not know you liked high places," Emmet says, hesitant.

"Another thing that makes me different from who I was before?" Ingo asks, quiet but biting. He looks at the scars and callouses on his hand, brows drawn low. His fingers curl into a fist. Chandelure makes a low, sad chiming sound.

Emmet doesn't know how to respond. Because Ingo is right—that's exactly what it is. And yet, that's not *all* it is.

"That is…hard, yes," Emmet admits, trying to be careful with his words for once, after the way he hurt his brother earlier. "But it is not the differences that bother me the most. It is simply…the reminder, that you went through something so horrible and I was not there with you."

Ingo shakes his head, looking even more upset. "But it *wasn't* all horrible. Just because that's all you can see doesn't mean there wasn't good to be found in Hisui, too."

Ah, Emmet thinks, something regretful hitting him in the chest. Ingo… has a point. He has found it rather difficult to look past the obvious trauma, both physical and mental, that Hisui left on his brother. Has been finding it hard to look past anything but his own wishful thinking that they could leave Hisui behind.

But now, Emmet doesn't try to project or ignore or pretend, and he just *looks*. And Ingo looks…unhappy. He fiddles with his two bracelets —the wooden bangle of the Pearl Clan's warden, and the friendship

bracelet made by a girl close enough to call him *Uncle*.

For the first time, it dawns on Emmet that Ingo has truly lost something in returning to him. Something, somewhere, even some people and Pokemon that he *loved*. His whole life as he knows it. And Emmet has been trying to bury that memory, his brother's *only* memories, at every opportunity. Trying to erase the Ingo that returned to him in favor of a ghost.

Emmet swallows hard. "Tell me about Hisui."

"You…*want* to hear about Hisui?"

"The good parts," Emmet clarifies. "All I have focused on so far are the *bad* parts. So tell me about the good parts of Hisui. What you miss."

Ingo stares at Emmet for a moment more, unsure. Emmet pokes him in the arm, urging him on with a tight smile.

Finally, Ingo sighs and looks up to the sky, black and blank in the middle of the city.

"Hisui had the most beautiful skies at night," Ingo says, quiet and wistful. "Layers of stars spanning from one edge of your sight to the other. It felt so vast, like you could fall into it. Many nights when I could not sleep, I would go outside and look up at the sky. It made my problems seem small and insignificant in comparison."

Emmet hums. He recalls seeing that kind of sky many times, when they were on their Pokemon journey as children. It was always enough to render him speechless with its beauty. Emmet and Ingo hadn't left Nimbasa in a long time before Ingo's disappearance—maybe they need to make a habit of getting back to nature.

Ingo is quiet for a moment, letting out a shaky breath. "I miss Lady Sneasler as well."

"She was the one who saved you, right?" Emmet asks, glancing at his brother and feeling a swell of gratitude for this stranger separated from them by centuries.

Ingo nods. "Many times. She was the evolution of an ancient sneasel variant. Excellent at climbing the rocky cliffs, and an even better companion. Always full of sass! You would have loved to meet her."

Emmet chuckles, even as Ingo sniffs back tears. “Akari said you were her…warden?”

Ingo nods, spine straightening with something proud. “Yes. The Pearl Clan were rightfully wary of me, but from the moment I woke up Lady Sneasler was determined that she and I would be riding the same tracks. She chose me as her warden within the hour and upset every elder in the village.”

Emmet bursts into laughter, imagining his poor, misplaced brother faced with an entire village of outraged strangers and a defensive Pokemon wrapped around him.

“Sounds familiar,” Emmet jokes, gesturing to Chandelure, still glowing contentedly at Ingo’s hip.

Ingo chuckles, petting her glass without an ounce of fear for the ghostly flames. “Yes, much like this, actually. Perhaps that is why Lady Sneasler and I became so close so quickly. Sharp as a tack and loyal as they come, she was. Although she loved to tease me.” Ingo’s eyes flick up to Emmet, warm. “Like someone else I know.”

Emmet grins his best shit-eating grin. “Who? You could not possibly be referring to me, your darling dearest baby brother.”

Ingo laughs, and Emmet feels for a moment that they are suddenly in the past again. Bantering and teasing one another.

A gentler quiet falls over them.

“I miss Irida as well,” Ingo confides after a moment. “And Zisu. Aside from Akari, they were my closest human companions. Irida was young, but she took me into the Pearl Clan without hesitation and vouched for me as warden, despite the disapproval of her elders.”

“She sounds brave,” Emmet murmurs.

“She was. I wonder…I wonder what became of her, after I left. I hope she lived a long life.”

Ingo’s voice chokes up, and he has to take a moment to wipe away a fresh wave of tears.

Emmet’s heart aches in sympathy. When Ingo disappeared and it was clear that *something* had happened to him, Emmet’s biggest wish—second only to finding his brother alive—was that Ingo was somehow

out there living a new life in some distant place, happy and healthy.

“Maybe there are records of her,” Emmet suggests, even thought he's not sure he should get Ingo’s hopes up. “Since she was a clan leader.”

Ingo looks to Emmet with painfully hopeful eyes. “Do you think so?”

Emmet shrugs. “Maybe! We can always look later. I left my Xtrans downstairs.”

Ingo nods, taking a calming breath as he continues to talk.

Emmet learns about Zisu, Ingo’s first battling partner in Hisui and the one adult who actually went out of her way to strike up friendly conversation with the outsider of Jubilife. She would drag him to the local cook for meals and talk strategy that kept his battling skills sharp. Apparently the woman was always willing to try out a new tactic or move, which was a rarity for the time.

And then there's Melli, a silly man apparently desperate for attention. But he kept Ingo’s days in the mountains lively and never hesitated to talk to the amnesiac warden, even if most of their conversations were arguments. Ingo speaks of their interactions with laughter in his voice, as if they were just a game.

Emmet listens dutifully, trying to be supportive of Ingo and not hurt by the fondness and grief lining Ingo’s face. Emmet has to remind himself, over and over, that Ingo was gone for three years without his memories. It’s *good* that he made connections with others. He didn’t have Elesa to keep him on the tracks like Emmet did.

And it's with that in mind that Emmet takes what he learns about Hisui, about the untouched landscapes and the comforting cries of wild Pokemon native to ancient Sinnoh, and he tries to imagine it for himself. Tries to picture his brother in the middle of it all, not hurt and unhappy in an untamed wilderness but instead fulfilled and at ease, surrounded by people and Pokemon he loved and the protective cradle of the mountains.

“You sound like you loved a lot about Hisui,” Emmet finally says, when Ingo falls silent.

Ingo swallows, throat bobbing in the low light of the rooftop. “I did. I do.”

For a moment, Emmet doesn’t follow up with the question he needs to

ask. It's bubbling up in his chest, needing to be released, but he knows the answer could break him.

"Are you happy?" Emmet blurts. "To be back."

Ingo doesn't answer as quickly as Emmet would like, tilting his head back against the neon sign. It paints his brother's pale eyes and hair in colorful hues, making him look like a stranger.

"I miss…much of Hisui," Ingo finally says. "I miss knowing how the world around me worked. I miss feeling like I knew what I was meant to do."

Emmet works against the lump in his throat. He nods, trying to be encouraging.

"I miss all of that," Ingo says. He pauses then, gathering his thoughts before giving Emmet a soft smile, mostly in the eyes. "But in Hisui, I missed this world too, even if I do not remember much of it. I want to be here. With you and Elesa and our Pokemon. I know in my heart that our tracks were never meant to part for long."

Oh, thank Arceus. Emmet isn't sure what he would've done if Ingo admitted he would rather go back. Even if he never *could*, the thought would still weigh heavily on Emmet's shoulders.

"Good," Emmet breathes. He lets his body sag to the side, leaning against Ingo. His brother holds him up easily. "It is normal, I think, to…miss what was. At least some of it. Especially because it is all you know. But I was afraid that you regretted it. Coming back."

"I do not," Ingo says, voice firm. He wraps a strong arm around Emmet's shoulders. It feels like forgiveness. "It is…a bit overwhelming, right now. And I fear pushing you away with the differences I hold to the old me. But I *am* happy that I am here."

Emmet shakes his head into Ingo's shoulder. "I was wrong, in the hotel room. You have changed, but you are still my brother. That is all that matters."

"Even when you get frustrated with me for not remembering?" Ingo asks, voice quiet. "For being different?"

Emmet feels a pang of regret. He should not have gotten so worked up. It isn't Ingo's fault. He just hates to see his brother look so afraid. "Even then. I'm sorry for getting upset. For saying that. I didn't mean

it.”

“I apologize as well for, ah. The strain my disappearance has put on you. I am sure it has not been easy.”

Emmet chuckles. “Elesa had to deal with the brunt of my breakdown. And maintenance.”

Ingo’s arm squeezes Emmet close, and for the briefest moment Emmet feels nothing but safety and a quiet joy. It feels like they used to be, like they were over three years ago. When Ingo was Ingo and Emmet was all right.

But no. No. That isn't how it is, and Emmet needs to accept that. Besides, the present can’t be too bad if it feels so similar to the beloved past.

“I am sorry for touching your scar without asking, in the bathroom,” Emmet says. Now that he’s acknowledging his mess-ups, it seems like he has so many to apologize for.

“I knew you wouldn't put me in danger,” Ingo assures. “That was just…a very frightening scar to receive, and I don’t do well with others touching it. Fear took over for a moment.”

Emmet turns to wrap his arms around Ingo’s torso. Even trying to accept Ingo’s circumstances, he doesn’t want to think about his many injuries. Scars and bones healed incorrectly and lingering signs of pain.

Ingo hums, reading his thoughts. “I won’t tell unless you ask, Emmet. Don’t fret.”

Emmet shakes his head again, parroting the sentence he has heard so often in the past three years, “You should. It is healthy to talk about it.”

“But it is *not* healthy to torture my poor younger brother with the messy details. Besides, is that not what the, ah, therapist is for?”

“True,” Emmet relents. “Still. If you want to tell me, I will listen.”

“I know, Emmet,” Ingo says, propping his chin on Emmet’s head. “And if *you* want to tell *me*, I will be here.“

“I know,” Emmet echoes, smile coming easily to his face.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Returning to the home station. Full speed ahead!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day dawns bright and clear, the Sinnoh sky blue overhead. After a tearful goodbye with Akari and a promise to keep in touch so she can visit sometime in the coming weeks, Ingo, Emmet, and Elesa head back to Unova.

Aside from the debacle of trying to get Chandelure back into her pokeball (she only settles once Ingo promises to hold onto her the entire trip), the plane ride back to Unova is rather uneventful. Ingo looks uneasy once they lift off, so Emmet takes his free hand, commiserating about how he isn't fond of flying, either.

"It is much less…frightening, atop Gliscor," Ingo mutters.

Emmet gives him a bright smile. "I do not believe you."

Elesa teases them both about being big babies, but takes the window seat without complaint when Ingo keeps looking nervously at the clouds drifting by outside.

They land in Strialton by late afternoon, and forego their usual visit to Skyla to try to get Ingo settled in first. They head straight to Nimbasa, Elesa driving a rental car back to the city.

To their home.

Emmet can't help chattering on about everything they pass, telling Ingo about their favorite pizza place on the corner where they used to go every Friday night and the grocery store with the best selection of fresh ingredients. He points out the Ferris wheel by Elesa's gym in the distance, and where they go to get their hair cut, and and and—

And unfortunately, their route doesn't go by Gear Station, but Emmet supposes that can be a surprise for another day.

Emmet tries not to sound too wistful or expecting of Ingo, sharing

their old haunts as he would with a friend visiting the city for the very first time. It only hurts a little bit, the feeling overshadowed by the awestruck way Ingo follows Emmet's erratic pointing to look out one window and then another. Ingo seems a bit overwhelmed, but there's something like excitement there too, like he's looking forward to exploring the bustling city once again.

Emmet's words don't falter until they reach their apartment complex, the three of them stepping out of the car to look up at the tall building.

"This is where we live?" Ingo asks, eyes wide and face pale.

Elesa laughs, catching on before Emmet. "Don't worry, you guys don't own the whole building. Just one floor."

"Oh," Ingo breathes, shoulders dropping from their tense hunch. "Good."

Emmet grins to hide his nerves. "Ready?"

Ingo visibly steels himself, releasing Chandelure so he can place a steadying hand on her side.

Emmet and Elesa lead the way up to the twins' apartment, relieved to find no one in the downstairs lobby. They still aren't quite sure how they're going to explain Ingo's sudden return.

When Emmet opens the apartment door with a too-loud jingle of keys and flips on the light to the foyer, he steps aside to present it with a silly, over-the-top flourish.

"Returning to the home station!"

Ingo huffs a laugh, following Emmet in with Elesa right behind him. Emmet pauses to remove his coat and hat, hanging them on the hooks by the door.

Ingo, either out of some thought for propriety (or maybe, Emmet can't help thinking, some buried memory) removes his own coat and hat, absentmindedly hanging them beside Emmet's before moving farther into the apartment.

Emmet freezes at the sight. He stares at the two coats hanging side-by-side. Ingo's is worn and ragged and nearly gray from the harsh bleaching of the sun, but…

But it's still Ingo's.

Emmet takes a shuddering breath as tears flood his vision, hot and merciless. He never thought that empty spot would be filled again. And it's different, of course, but…it's still *Ingo*.

Elesa puts a hand on Emmet's shoulder and squeezes, giving him a soft, understanding look before moving to follow Ingo into the apartment. Emmet, after taking a minute to calm himself, follows.

Ingo is trailing around the living room, Chandelure dogging his every step with a cheery, chiming tune. Elesa has sprawled herself across the couch, watching Ingo with an expression like warm honey. She glances at Emmet and pats the sliver of couch that's still open. Emmet sits at her side, letting himself be drawn into her hug. And the two of them watch.

Ingo is clearly curious and itching to explore. Still, every time he reaches for a knick-knack or a book, he stops himself. After the third or fourth time, he sends Emmet and Elesa a hesitant look.

Emmet gives his brother an encouraging smile. "It is your home too, Ingo."

Ingo flushes, but he looks just as pleased as he does embarrassed. He finally starts to pick up the objects that catch his interest, flipping through dusty books and accidentally turning on model train sets, jumping when they whirr to life.

When he sees the photos hung on the walls and propped up on the TV stand, he slows to get a better look. They're all "family" photos, mostly of the twins and Elesa and their Pokemon, but there are a few with other friends and acquaintances and one with their parents, when they were young. Ingo touches the edges of the frames reverently, eyes glossy with tears. Emmet is suddenly terribly glad he never followed through on his impulsive thoughts to rip those photos down, to shatter them on the floor.

When Ingo has exhausted the living room, Emmet gets up to show him around the kitchen and bathroom, then the guest room, Emmet's room, and finally—

"My room?" Ingo guesses, staring across the hall at the closed door.

Emmet fights the urge to fidget. "Yup. It…might be a little dusty." He had slept in there, often, the first year. Then he could not bear to step

foot inside.

Ingo gives him an understanding look. Then he moves forward, cautiously opening the door.

Once the light is flicked on, Emmet is sucker punched by the familiar surroundings that he hasn't so much as looked at in two years. The desk and the stack of books covering it are indeed covered in dust. As is the bookshelf and even the unmade bedspread twisted across the mattress. Otherwise, it's tidy and relatively minimal, although there is a little litwick plush sitting on the windowsill and more photos and articles hung up and framed around the room.

Ingo steps inside the hallowed space, looking more haunted by this echo of another life than he did by the shared living spaces. Slowly, though, he gravitates around to take it all in.

"You all right?" Elesa finally asks.

"I don't remember it," Ingo admits, glancing at Emmet with a remorseful expression. "Any of it."

Emmet doesn't want to lie to his brother after their talk yesterday, so he lets his beaming smile drop, just slightly. Not gone completely, but closer to how he actually feels right now. "That is all right. We expected that might happen."

Ingo slowly nods, looking around again. "I don't remember it, but…"

"But?" Elesa prompts.

Ingo gives them a soft smile, an actual upturn of the lips that's more befitting of Emmet than Ingo. "I do feel safe here. Comfortable, in a way I usually am not."

Oh, the tears are back. Funny, Emmet never really considered himself a crier until Ingo disappeared. Wordlessly, Emmet marches forward and yanks his brother into a tight hug. He's shaking, but Ingo is sturdy and strong as he hugs him back, warm and alive and *here*.

The rest of the night goes by in a blur as they release their Pokemon to roam free as usual. Ingo's Hisuian team stay in their balls for now, all rather large and unused to living indoors with fragile, breakable furniture. They make a single exception for Alakazam, who seems very polite. When the stoic psychic type is released, he looks around at the sudden rush of new technology and knowledge like a kid in a candy

store.

Elesa stays over for a sleepover, of course, and they order Paldean takeout from one of the few places that actually delivers to the apartment building at this time of night. They put on a silly old action movie they always used to make fun of, and one of Emmet's deadpan quips makes Ingo laugh so hard he chokes on his drink.

And sitting here slapping Ingo on the back, surrounded by his two favorite people and their Pokemon, laughing so hard his stomach hurts and tears come to his eyes, Emmet realizes something.

Ingo might never remember the past, but that doesn't mean they can't just make *new* memories with him. Equally happy memories!

Emmet knows, logically, that there will be times he gets frustrated or upset with Ingo's amnesia, and times when Ingo will feel overwhelmed and disconnected. But somehow, knowing that there *will* be laughter and warmth and contentment in the future makes that all feel a lot more manageable.

When they fall asleep at 2:00am, they're sprawled across the fluffy living room rug like a heap of lillipup, pillows and cushions and blankets in a haphazard tangle around them. Emmet has his leg across Ingo's chest and a hand curled around Elesa's elbow, and he has never felt more at peace.

Emmet wakes the next morning far too early, groaning and cracking open an eye to figure out what woke him.

Haxorus' low, happy croon tips him off, and he cranes his head from his uncomfortable position on the floor to find Ingo leaning against the kitchen doorway. Haxorus is headbutting him for affection—gently, with her dangerous axes tilted carefully away.

Emmet watches as Ingo instinctively moves his hand to scratch at Haxorus' neck in the spot she likes best, right between two plates. She rumbles a pleased sound, and Ingo chuckles.

Huh.

Emmet noticed that last night. That sometimes, especially around their Pokemon, Ingo moves or does things in a way that would suggest he *does* remember, except that it's clearly never conscious. Muscle memory, maybe.

Each time he spotted Ingo effortlessly holding Durant back from stealing their takeout or instinctively handing their trash to Garbodor, Emmet wasn't sure if he would rather those hints of memory be gone entirely to spare him the hope of Ingo's memories returning, or if he cherishes the *rightness* of those moments too much to let them go.

Either way, Emmet will not be bringing them up to Ingo any time soon. He is going to do his best not to compare Ingo to his old self, especially right to Ingo's face. Instead, he plans to reintroduce Ingo to their old life without any expectations of recognition, hard as that sounds. He owes his brother that, at least.

His first real test comes two days later, after Ingo has somewhat settled into the world of the present within the four walls of their apartment. Alakazam and Chandelure are two constant, soothing presences at his brother's side.

(Introducing the concept of gentle play and *not* destroying the furniture to Ingo's other Hisuian Pokemon is a *very* slow work in progress. After Tangrowth flattened a kitchen chair within an hour of being released, they decided it would need to be taken a day at a time. So for now, only Alakazam has the privilege of free roam.)

Elesa had to return to work to battle restless challengers and catch up on some modeling shoots, leaving Emmet to lead the charge on his next personal mission alone.

Today, he is going to show Ingo Gear Station!

Ingo seems a little wary when Emmet presents two outfits for the day with a proud grin and an exclamation of, "Disguises!" But what else is he supposed to say? They'll be recognized immediately if they wear their coats and uniforms!

Luckily, it doesn't take much convincing for Ingo to put on the floppy fishing cap, sunglasses and jeans alongside his pale pink Pearl Clan hoodie—nondescript clothes that are as far from their pristine, black-and-white outfits as possible. Emmet dons a slightly different floppy hat, ignoring Ingo's muttered questions of why they even have such ridiculous headgear, and drags his brother out the door.

For the first time, Emmet is glad that Ingo moves differently than he did before Hisui. He slouches slightly, probably from one of his old injuries, and moves with a much more natural, unhurried gate. Emmet tries to copy it, and probably looks more ridiculous in the process. Thankfully, even two semi-celebrities like the Subway Masters (and notably the *missing* Subway Master) can avoid detection in the bustling Nimbasa streets, with some careful planning of their route and some truly ingenious disguises.

(Ingo gives him a deadpan look when Emmet says this, but it only makes Emmet grin wider.)

While Emmet would love to show Ingo the formal front entrance to Gear Station, that'll have to wait until after they announce Ingo's return. Too risky, too easily seen.

Instead, Emmet leads Ingo to one of the quieter stairwells down to the commuter subway. It isn't very busy, and in the middle of the day like this, everyone is too focused on getting to where they're going to pay any attention to the two strangely dressed men who inch close to the tracks.

"This is the subway train?" Ingo whispers, looking around skeptically. His eyes linger on the dark, yawning mouth of the tunnel.

Emmet scoffs at Ingo's tone. Sure, this side station isn't much to look at, but at least it's sparkling clean! That's better than most public transit Emmet has endured. "This is only a station. A small one. Now we wait."

Ingo nods, glancing curiously at the commuters and their Pokemon nearby.

Finally, five minutes later, there's a familiar rumble in the distance. The ground beneath their feet shakes slightly, and Ingo glances nervously at his brother. Emmet grins and takes Ingo's hand. A piercing whistle echoes down the tunnel, followed by the faint glow of its headlights growing closer and closer. And then all at once, there's the subway train, blasting by them and nearly knocking off their hats, wind whipping at their clothes.

Emmet whoops in the loud sound-vacuum of the subway.

He looks at Ingo, who has gone very, very still. For a brief moment, Emmet sees Ingo's shocked expression and locked limbs and fears that he just sent Ingo into a panic.

But then the spell breaks, and Ingo's eyes *shine*. He laughs, loud and ecstatic. He throws his arms out to let the wind buffet him more fully, closing his eyes with a beaming smile.

Emmet laughs too, relieved and overjoyed, and throws his arms out to match.

When the roar of the train finally settles to a stop, the doors open with a hiss. A crowd of people filter out, talking on their phones or power-walking off to unknown destinations. Ingo and Emmet scoot out of the open, leaning against the nearest wall. Ingo is still staring at the train as people board, his silly sunglasses pulled down so his eyes can trace the sleek metal accents.

"Enjoying the view?" Emmet teases.

Ingo nods. "I am! This is marvelous." Then he whips around to look hopefully at Emmet. "Can you tell me how it works?"

Emmet grins, promising to help Ingo locate the books in their home that discuss the machinery and inner workings of the subway trains. That was always more of Ingo's interest than Emmet's, but he's sure he can track them down somewhere in their mini library.

They watch three more trains come and go. While they wait for each one to arrive, Ingo asks question after question, about where the trains go and how the battle trains are set up and if they can really ride them sometime?

At that last question, Emmet promises he'll get Ingo onto a train as soon as he can. Probably after they drop the bomb to the public that he's back. And before that, they'll have to notify the Gear Station workers!

Emmet knows the Gear Station employees will be overjoyed at Ingo's return, but he decides to wait a few more days for that reintroduction. He doesn't know whether it's a selfish decision, wanting to keep Ingo to himself for a little longer, or a selfless one, keeping Ingo away from the scrutiny and expectations. Then Emmet realizes he doesn't care.

Slowly. They're going to take this slowly.

Somehow, they manage to exit the subway and head back home without being spotted. Ingo immediately requests to call Akari upon their return to the apartment, the lingering excitement clear in his expression and twitching hands.

A few days ago, Emmet thinks his heart would have wrenched at the request, and even now some selfish part of him thinks, *Aren Elesa and I not enough?* before he punches that thought squarely in the face. Akari is important to Ingo, and wanting to share his discovery of subway trains with her is a great sign that his brother is genuinely happy and excited.

Besides, Akari has been checking in on Ingo—and vice-versa—every night since they separated, so Emmet easily pulls up Akari's contact info on his Xtransciever with a nod and a smile.

Akari is thrilled to see and hear from Ingo, of course, and Emmet is endeared despite himself when she patiently listens to Ingo ramble on about his experience with the subway trains for twenty minutes straight.

Akari is good for his brother. And Ingo is good for her. And Emmet is trying hard to accept that the girl being a part of their lives now is not a bad thing.

So while they work on getting Ingo a new Xtransciever of his own, Akari continues to keep in touch with the both of them through Emmet's. She texts Emmet for frequent "Uncle Ingo Check-Ins," and the three of them (plus their Pokemon) video chat every other day, the two newly-returned trainers sharing news and gushing over modern amenities.

On day four, Ingo goes to the restroom during one such call. Emmet, left in an awkward silence with the teenager, hesitates only briefly before sharing the story of Ingo falling asleep on the couch the night before. He refused to get up and go to sleep in his own bed, at which point Chandelure trilled a scolding sound and scooped her trainer up like a sack of potatoes in order to carry him there herself. Akari squeals like she's just seen a baby joltik and demands pictures the next time it happens.

And Emmet realizes that maybe he has a new connection in Akari, too.

Additionally, with the help of her friends, Akari *does* get her old phone working again after a few days. So of course, the pictures and videos from her time in Hisui follow shortly after.

It's incredible, seeing actual high-definition photos and videos from ancient Sinnoh, and with Akari right in the middle of everything. There are far too many memes (her T-posing in front of *actual god of*

space Palkia makes Emmet laugh so hard he cries, which isn't helped by Ingo mumbling about "Never understanding that strange gesture") but there are also hundreds of pictures of the nature and Pokemon of the time. Untouched, sprawling landscapes of lush fields and forests, open swamplands and icy tundras that seem to soothe and sting Ingo in equal measure. When Akari sends photos of the mountains, Ingo swallows hard and grips the little device with white knuckles, taking in every detail of the images with hungry eyes.

And of course, Akari has many snapshots of the people of Hisui. Ingo looks delighted in particular by the appearance of a small, blonde, blue-eyed girl in bright pinks who holds herself like a military leader, and a giant, muscular redhead of a woman with a cocky grin. Irida and Zisu, as it turns out. He tells Emmet about each of them again, smiling even as his words are wistful and his eyes grow wet.

(They would find out later after a bit of research that Irida did indeed live a long and seemingly happy life. Emmet is relieved and Ingo has to excuse himself for the cathartic cry that follows.)

As they scroll through the pictures in chronological order, they eventually make it to the point where Ingo finally makes his appearance. He is accompanied by a tall, lanky sneasel-like Pokemon, who Emmet quickly learns is the Lady Sneasler who saved his brother from certain death multiple times. Ingo blinks back tears at the sight of the strange Pokemon, hovering a finger over the screen as if he wants to reach out and touch.

Akari's pictures of Ingo start out blurry and distant, as if Akari wanted to capture images of Ingo but was too shy to ask him outright or get too close. Over time, the pictures grow closer and become focused, the acknowledgement of Akari's presence showing on Ingo's amused face. And then that changes too, slowly thawing over time until the photos of his brother are less a reverent snapshot of Warden Ingo and more a personal capture of the girl's beloved uncle.

By the end of it, the images almost always include Akari and Ingo together, smushed into the frame with Akari right in Ingo's space and his brother looking fond and content. Sometimes they're with their Pokemon in the snow, sometimes they're by a campfire, and once or twice they're even resting in open fields, wearing vibrant flower crowns that make Emmet laugh and Ingo blush when he sees them.

It's at this point that Emmet realizes he is unbearably thankful for Akari. While Emmet knows she would not have photographed Ingo

during his roughest moments, when he was feeling sad or upset or hurt, it helps to know his brother was so visibly, genuinely happy at least some of the time.

Akari seems to be a large part of that happiness. They make plans for the girl to visit Nimbasa with her two friends in a few weeks. She asks excitedly about hiking together on the nearby routes and going on the Ferris wheel and rollercoaster and subway trains in the city.

Ingo is thrilled, of course, immediately going on a cleaning rampage to fix up their guest room. Emmet teases his brother for being such a softie for the girl, but wastes no time in looking up nearby shops to buy hiking gear for all of them, as well as cluing Elesa in on the plans so she can take time off from the gym. It'll be like they're on their Pokemon journey again!

…Huh.

Actually, Emmet could probably convince Elesa and Ingo to join him on a *proper* backwoods tour of Unova in the future. A…Pokemon Journey 2.0, since Ingo no longer recalls the first.

Certainly something to think about, Emmet thinks with a smile.

And it hits Emmet then, as he's scrolling through maps and deals on camping gear, a week and a half after their return to Nimbasa and a day before the three of them plan to officially announce Ingo's return, that Emmet is *happy*. His smiles don't feel forced anymore, even when one of them has a bad night and Ingo wakes up screaming or Emmet bolts upright in a cold sweat, sprinting across the hall just to make sure Ingo really is back.

Emmet knows that Ingo is still adapting, and that he will never be the same Ingo from before Hisui. Some part of Emmet aches when he is reminded of that, when Ingo flinches away from the loud, sudden sounds of construction work outside their apartment or looks blankly back at Emmet after an old inside joke.

But more important is the fact that Ingo is still here at all. He is different, but he is still Ingo. Still his brother. Emmet has the chance to make entirely new memories with him, reintroducing him to all their favorite things.

In the future, on the rare days when they have to part—briefly, for now, for both their sakes—Emmet is sure to catch his brother's hand and look him in the eye as he reminds him that he loves him.

And Ingo gives him a soft smile and says, “I love you too, Em.”

They never used to say it aloud before Hisui, before being ripped apart. But this is one difference Emmet is glad for.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for joining me on this ride, everyone! :')

End Notes

I ran out of reunion fics so I decided it was time to write my own, haha! Please leave a kudo or a comment if you're enjoying the story. Thanks for reading!!! :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!